

元貴族令嬢で
未婚の母ですが、
娘たちが可愛すぎて
冒険者業も
苦になりません

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FORMER NOBLE AND SINGLE MOTHER ADVENTURE

**Even Though I'm a Former Noble and a Single Mother, My Daughters Are
Too Cute and Working as an Adventurer Isn't Too Much of a Hassle**

**- VOLUME 1 -
Adventurer**

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[Mistakes Were Made]

- STORY -

The noble class that treats those born with white hair or heterochromia as treacherous snakes, Shirley was born into the family of the most powerful duke in the land adorned with stunning hair the colour of snow, and non-matching red and blue eyes.

Hated by her own family, and having the only man who she ever loved snatched away by a jealous younger sister on her wedding night, she is imprisoned on false charges.

Enduring torture and humiliation, she vowed to take revenge against those who wronged her. But, even though she escaped, in her belly there was the child of her former fiancée.

Even if the man himself is hateful, an unborn child is without sin. After giving birth to healthy twins, she thought to leave them at an orphanage for safekeeping, but...

“Ah, what to do, my daughters are just too cute.”

Shirley was floored by the feelings she held for the two girls she had brought into the world. Choosing motherhood over revenge, she fled the Empire and settled in a remote town in the neighbouring Kingdom. In order to support her children, she found herself entering through the doors of the Adventurers Guild. It would be nice if they could live a nice quiet life out here, where the empire won't think to look for them...

“Ms. Shirley! Calamity-class monsters are appearing in the Kingdom! Can you help us!?”

“I’m very sorry, but I have to decline. I’m helping my daughters with their homework today.”

After ten years, she had somehow become known around the world over as “The Demonic White Sword”.







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Prologue

First Part

“What is this!? This hair and those eyes... How repugnant!”

The first words of that new mother were full of scorn, her face twisting as if she had just seen a hideous monster.

From a Hero who wields a saintly sword to the dragon who rules an entire continent by fear, from the unparalleled geniuses who built up an entire nation’s economy with a shrewd invention to vampires who ruled the streets at night, many myths and legends have shaped this world. But to the aristocracy of the empire, nothing is more ominous than the legend surrounding the White-Haired Demon.

Three centuries prior, a revolution against the excesses and cruelty of the noble classes spread across the land, at one point holding two-thirds of the country under its sway. Its leader wore a frightening visage; hair as white as snow and eyes of differing colour.

This Hero of the common folk forced the nobility to come to terms in a harsh peace. This White-Haired Demon forced the aristocrats to give up many of their ancient rights and privileges.

Although the aristocracy may have survived the revolt, they never forget the humiliation of defeat. To this day, anyone with white hair or heterochromia was treated like a viper in the crib, no matter what their true ability or personality may be.

It was into one of the largest noble families in the Empire, the House of Earlgrey, a child was born. With red and blue eyes and white hair, her name was Shirley Earlgrey. To possess not one but both of those hated features made Shirley a cursed child from the beginning, treated like a snake despite her status as a high ranking noblewoman.

Even nobles well below her station mocked and ridiculed Shirley. A long time ago, the aristocracy would simply abandon any child who was sickly, ugly or simply did not strike their fancy. However, since the revolution, nobles were now beholden to the same laws as the commons.

But for Shirley, perhaps being cut off from the nobility would have been a blessing in disguise.

She was never called by name, only ever called a White-Haired Demon or Monster. Afforded none of the privileges of other noble girls, she was dressed in rags and was always given scraps to eat, far away from the family's dining room. If she committed a mistake, she would be beaten mercilessly. If she caught the eye of someone in a bad mood, she would be scorned or kicked at. Members of families that were supposed to be vassals to Shirley's treated her as if she were an animal, and the family servants never interfered in this treatment.

Even though she grew up in such conditions, every day she somehow only became more beautiful, as if it were inversely proportional to the cruel treatment she received.

Her white hair bore the radiance of fresh snowfall, and those red and blue eyes gleamed as if they were precious gemstones. Perhaps because of the depressing future she inevitably faced, her beauty was like a transient moon, something fantastical that seemed like it could shatter at the slightest touch.

It was Alice who poured insults on her appearance the most, but in reality, she burned with jealousy for how beautiful her older sister Shirley was growing up to be. Although also fairly pretty herself, her beauty paled in comparison to Shirley's. Despite being born from the same parents, Alice was the one who took the opportunities to torment her.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry 'Onee-sama'. I seem to have dropped your meal."

Day after day, Alice's violence and cruelty towards her only sister only became ever bolder as Shirley grew ever more comely. She would constantly commit petty acts like forcing Shirley to eat off the floor after 'accidentally' dropping her meal, or attacking her with a wooden sword under the excuse of 'practicing swordsmanship'. Such things that went far beyond mere pranks.

It was the definition of malice, to constantly inflict such cruelty on someone who had done no wrong and had no means of defense. This only intensified as there was no one to remonstrate with Alice.

The youngest daughter who received all the love her family could give, and the cursed child that was the object of all enmity. Even if it was cruel, those strange eyes and white

hair were treated as a testimony of guilt, and whatever Alice decided to do was indulged.

Shirley was already tired of life at the tender age of eleven.

One day, as Shirley cradled her knees quietly in the corner of the gardens hoping to simply disappear, she heard the voice of an unfamiliar boy overhead.

"Hey, you, what are you doing in such a place?"

The Crown Prince, Albert Ragdoll. That was this boy's name and station.

Also eleven years old like Shirley, at the time he was visiting the Duke alongside his father the Emperor, and as he was exploring the mansion he spotted her completely by chance.

The boy was immediately taken in by her stunning beauty the moment she lifted her head to look at him. And upon learning the true reasons behind her bedraggled appearance, the ostracization inflicted upon her by her own family for her hair and eyes, he took Shirley's hand and rushed to the Emperor.

"Father! I have decided to take Shirley as my fiancée!"

It was thus, on the momentum of love at first sight, that the engagement was unexpectedly accepted. Those features that were hated by the aristocracy, the Emperor viewed them favorably. Before the Revolution, the Emperor was merely a puppet in the hands of oligarchic nobles. When that Hero with white hair took the country, he restored the Emperor to true power.

Although her lack of noble etiquette and education would be a problem at her age, Shirley was willing to practice to the point of bleeding in order to master such things for the first person to ever show her love and kindness since the day she was born.

For eight whole years... she was happy.

As the fiancée to the Crown Prince, she was well out of reach of the tormenting hands of her family and especially her sister, and Shirley grew up to be a lady of both intelligence and almost unreal beauty.

She also understood ‘pain’ better than anyone in the royal family, as she had gone through such ‘pain’ her whole life before coming to the capital. Her philanthropic nature and reputation of being kind to commoners and castle servants made her incredibly popular, and she became trusted by both the Emperor and Empress implicitly. Her relationship with Albert also stayed strong, and when they consummated the night before the marriage ceremony, she felt happier than she ever had been.

However, this Cinderella story was about to be torn apart under the cruel auspices of malice.

After eight long years, Alice’s envy had become similar to a maddening obsession. Such a beautiful older sister, she couldn’t acknowledge its existence.

That older sister who had always secretly looked down on her, and now she was to be a member of the royal family?

And worst of all, she was an older sister full of vile and low cunning, who stole Albert away from her, even though she had loved him first.

“I hereby annul my engagement to Shirley Earlgrey, and announce my new engagement to her sister, Alice Earlgrey!”

Due to various circumstances, Alberto and Shirley had spent less and less time together as the years went on. Although Shirley didn’t feel any anxiety about not being constantly at Albert’s side, as they were already formally engaged and she considered their relationship to be good, Alice’s plot had already taken root.

“On that day eight years ago, you cried crocodile tears and acted your best to fool me! And not only have you been utterly unfaithful to me with untold numbers of men, but you are also a disgraceful woman who has been tormenting Alice since the day of her birth and then accusing her falsely of doing such things to you!”

As she was restrained on the ground Alberto’s knight and close confidant, she simply couldn’t understand what Albert was saying. As she looked up at him, she saw Alice tightly hugging one of his arms.

“I... I don’t understand, Albert-sama...? These things you say, I have no memory of eve-”

“Don’t call me by my name! Truly, every time I think of the love I thought we shared, it leaves me feeling sick!”

The most beloved man in her world spat such words at her from the bottom of his heart.

“If you’re so insistent on feigning innocence, then so be it! I will tell you your crimes in detail!”

Guilty of tormenting Alice from a young age.

Guilty of adultery with an uncountable number of men.

Guilty of leaking state secrets to a neighbouring power.

Guilty of corruption and embezzlement of the national budget.

No proof of any accusation, all baseless claims.

“Such a thing... it fills my heart with sorrow, Onee-sama. Even though such unfortunate things happened when we were children, I hoped that one day we could live hand in hand as true sisters.”

Albert feels true compassion for Alice, whose tears streak down her face. It was only when Albert hugged her that Shirley was shown a vicious and ugly face of malicious triumph, that only she caught a glimpse of.

“Despite having such a gentle and noble girl as Alice for a sister...! The likes of you should never be Queen! Alice, more kind-hearted than any, is my one and true destiny!”

Shirley’s fiancée embraced her little sister with passion. Alice looked down on her with a sense of gleeful superiority in those tear-soaked eyes. For all those eight years, Alice’s harboured grudge had finally blossomed into this scene.

Shirley does not understand how this came to be. It wasn’t just Albert that had been snatched away by Alice, she had somehow turned all those trustworthy allies looking on against her as well.

“Besides, these past few years, I’ve been completely unable to stand the sight of you! Despite starting so late, you’ve already developed a sense of swordsmanship, letters, and magic that go far beyond anyone else’s! What kind of man would people think me to be, with such a woman at my side!? It kept me awake at night!”

It was those words that truly tore at Shirley's heart. All that effort that she made to support her Prince, hoping one day to stand alongside him and serve him when he was Emperor... Tears finally began to drop from those differing jeweled eyes.

"Th-that kind of... There must be some kind of mistake...! Please, see reason and look at the facts again...! I beg of you...! Please... Please believe me...! Alberto-sama...!"

"Silence! I don't want to hear your poisoned words! Guards! Take this woman to a cell at once!"

As her protests are swallowed up by the taunts and jeers of the people she considered friends and allies in the hall, she is roughly dragged out by the palace guards. Whatever pleas she made to the men carrying her away fell on deaf ears, and the dazzling dress she wore was swapped for a loose and torn rag worn by prisoners. Shirley was imprisoned.

Prologue

Second Part

“He he he, now then, this business about selling state secrets... Let’s start seeing some honesty, huh!”

Tsssssh!

“Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!”

The chief torturer swings with all his might, and the whip leaves a burning laceration on that pure white skin.

Shirley screamed in agony. No matter what she had suffered before, she had never felt anything like this.

“Oh! What a fantastic scream! Let me hear some more!”

He smiled sadistically and cracked the whip over her white limbs over and over again.

In order to get a false confession out of Shirley, there was little hesitation about using torture.

In present times, the law in the Empire stated that in order to bring a defendant to trial, there must be reasonable evidence or a confession. If she could not get Shirley to admit to these imagined crimes on her own, Alice was more than willing to use violent coercion to meet that end.

(It’s alright... This kind of misunderstanding... I’m sure it can definitely be solved someday!)

Despite being brought low by her sister, betrayed by her fiancée and in such horrid surroundings, Shirley still didn’t give up hope.

Once Albert realized the truth, they could go back to how they were before. Using that as a foundation, she desperately tried to resist the torture, holding onto memories of

happier times with Albert for comfort.

However, that fleeting hope the nineteen-year-old girl clung to was soon cruelly betrayed.

What followed made the whip seem cute.

Tearing out the nails with pliers. Burning on a Wooden Horse. Faced with atrocities that would make even the most mighty of warriors scream in delirium, that faint glimmer she held on to passed into nothing.

She had become a shadow of her former self, no longer the beauty that turned heads and courted envy. Her skin patchy and rough, her limbs covered in wounds that she does not have means to heal, her once beautiful white hair shriveled and grey like an old woman's. Shirley had gone from a beauty to a sight one couldn't bear to look at.

After a month had passed, the dashed hope that Albert would come to his senses and end her imprisonment had given way to a burning hatred that was more passionate than any love she ever felt for him.

“Gah... ah... haaaa...!!!”

A voiceless cry creaks from her ruined throat.

(I will never forgive them...! That person... never...!!)

Those gentle eyes that were once filled with a charitable spirit had been replaced with eyes that blazed with hatred and the desire to kill.

Even if she sold her soul to a demon, or was dragged into the pits of hell, she would drag all those who had done such wicked things to her down with her.

(My *former* father, mother, and brothers...)

Those who had made her life hell just for the way she was born.

(To those with whom I thought I shared a bond...)

Either through guile or extortion, she had been cast aside by those she had held out a hand to in their times of need.

(My sister who would take everything from me...)

Alice had finally managed to steal even this happiness from her.

(And above all... the man that betrayed me...!)

She finally understood. Albert was Shirley's fiancée, but he had engaged in an affair with Alice.

Did he cook up this conspiracy because he thought she would interfere with his relationship with Alice? Well, not that it matters.

Even if Alice was working to deceive him, the fact that man was willing to believe the flimsiest accusations against a woman who he knew deep down loved him dearly, more than anyone... Makes him the most despicable of the lot.

(I'll have my revenge...! Even if it means falling into hell, I'll still hammer in their skulls...!)

No matter how much energy she had, her dreams of revenge would be fruitless if Shirley rotted away in this dungeon.

Perhaps some god or demon was listening in on Shirley and accepted the offering of her soul, because a dramatic change soon occurred in her.

“W-what the hell is this...!?”

The first one to notice was the head torturer.

He had begun to grow tired of treating Shirley as his plaything and was only torturing her as work demanded now. But, as he opened the door to her cell, he was shocked by the stunning beauty of Shirley, who looked like she had never been tortured once.

Her skin had regained its sheen, that straggly hair had become radiant once more and the twenty nails he had pulled out one by one were restored.

The unsightly and brutalized bag of bones that he had finished with yesterday had been replaced by someone who had stepped back through time.

“T-this is impossible! I have to report this...!”

Stunned by what he had seen, and in a rush to report the information to his masters... the door had been left ajar.

“...Ahh, what a shame. If only he had come closer, I could have plunged this into his neck...”

Shirley stands and discards the sharp stone she was hiding.

Anyone who knew her before would shiver at that low voice that casually lamented missing the opportunity to murder.

“This body... I’d heard of the legends, but to think it would happen to me... But, it’s turned out alright in the end. Even if that man was saved by his own bumbling idiocy.”

It’s not in a commoner’s nature to think much of locking up. With the exception of the methodical and organized clerks, servants not locking doors and chests was a constant source of hassle in the castle.

She had planned on using this to her advantage some day, but Shirley was pleased it had come about so quickly.

“Well then, time to go... There are certain people I’d love to see.”

Stepping out of the cell, I managed to steal some unguarded servant clothes and slipped out into the grounds.

Shirley, who hid her conspicuous white hair underneath a cap, stole a sword and began her journey towards the royal castle. Just the thought of seeing Albert’s frightened face filled her with glee and her eyes retained that murderous intent.

“Please wait just a little longer. Someday very soon... I’ll be able to watch you suffer fates worse than death...”

Shirley passed unnoticed through the city and hid in an abandoned forest hut far from prying eyes.

As an escaped convict, Shirley had little hope of leveraging any political power.

So, what could she do? It didn’t take long to find an answer.

If you lack political influence, simply make up for it with overwhelming violence. To that end, the skill in magic and swordsmanship she developed as she wore herself to the bone trying to be a good fiancée for that hateful man will be useful.

Using her skills she would make a daring assault on the castle, break through the defenses, and visit a terrible fate upon Albert and Alice. She worked out scenarios in her mind to elongate Albert's suffering, no matter how much he begged for death.

Shirley's preparations were proceeding well. Surprisingly, she had little trouble swinging the sword that was designed for use by the opposite sex. She wasn't confident she could kill a strong monster with such a thing, but it will be more than enough to cut down a knight.

She stole what she needed from the city, other times she attacked bandit camps and took what she needed from their corpses. Slowly but surely, Shirley began to set the foundation for her plan.

“Gah... hahh...!”

Two months to the date of her broken engagement, and one month after she had escaped jail, Shirley was suddenly overwhelmed by a wave of nausea.

At first, she wondered if she had taken ill. But, these symptoms were strange. It started similar to a strong cold, but then she had serious problems staying awake at times and also had pains in her stomach and chest.

As she began to wonder if she should threaten a doctor into treating her, she suddenly remembered something.

“When was it... my last period...?”

The only word that suddenly appeared in my mind was ‘Pregnancy’.

As if to prove it, I slowly gained weight as the days rolled by. It didn't take much thinking to realize who the only possible father was.

“How can this be...? That detestable scum’s child is inside me...!”

From the bottom of my heart, I resented Albert’s child that lay in my belly. Shirley thought of slicing open her own belly and dragging it out herself, but she lowered her

sword and sighed.

"I can't do that, even if that man is its father, this child doesn't bear his sins. I'll bring it to term, and then find an orphanage to take it in."

Shirley had not yet fallen far enough yet to take the life of an innocent.

A life on the run is perilous for an unborn child, and it's no sure thing that it can be delivered safely. And although Shirley won't seek to abort the pregnancy, she doesn't feel much emotion for the life she now bears within herself.

"I need to refrain from full-scale training preparations until I give birth, but fighting some lower ranked beasts shouldn't be an issue."

Avoid strong monsters and ones that move at groups, strike at lone weak ones if at all possible. Continue to keep the sword arm strong, and practice magic daily. Even if she can't move around as well, light training is still important.

Still, this is well beyond what a pregnant woman should ever be doing. Although she can imagine the look of horror on the faces of mothers and doctors the world over, Shirley adopted a "Whatever happens, happens." approach to it all.

This ever-expanding belly of hers that demanded more and more nutrition was becoming a real disturbance to Shirley's revenge scheme.

It seems natural that man's flesh and blood would also hinder her. If she managed to actually deliver this child, she plans to be owed some gratitude.

"It's strange, though. I'm finding it harder to focus on training recently."

At some point, she had begun feeling awkward cramps any time she had tried to swing a sword around, and no matter what she couldn't take her mind off of it. It's a feeling that grows day by day.

She shook her head. Desperately, she tried to reach for that burning hatred that had kept her going, but she found that her thoughts would always return to the life growing in her womb.

"These symptoms... this illness... it really is a pain..."

Shirley tried to curse the child she bore, but the words clogged in her throat and she couldn't get them out, leaving her all the more bewildered.

She didn't know the reason. She didn't know, but somehow it didn't feel like something she should worry about.

"...Ah, it worked."

Her stomach swelled again, but this time it was an almost pleasant feeling. Touching her hand to her belly, she felt movement.

Even though she had barely practiced at all, she was feeling exhausted. Without her really noticing, the times where Shirley found herself with a sword in hand became rarer and rarer.

"Thank goodness I stockpiled food and supplies. This way, I can keep myself healthy until the birth... Wait, what am I saying? I..."

She wrestled with doubt as she looked at her reserved supplies, did she really stockpile all this just for her child? Shirley held a hand to her belly and waited until she felt movement, something which was becoming a routine.

This useless thing, that had no part to play in her revenge...

"At the very least, I'd really rather you not have his face."

She began to think of nothing but her child.

Whose face would it compare to? Because the father is that man, I'd rather if it resembled myself if at all possible.

Leaving it in the orphanage, and resuming the quest for vengeance... such thoughts caused her chest to tighten up.

The end of her full-term approached.

"It seems like it will be born soon. Finally, once the orphanage takes them in, I can continue with my revenge-

Just saying those words caused a chilling fright to run up her spine, her legs to tremble and her breathing became haggard.

The word she spoke. Even the sound of a word she had muttered over and over again caused an unfathomable fear to roll over her, and she gripped her enlarged belly.

The relief that washed through her when she felt a tiny heartbeat was immense.

"Ahhhhh! Guh... Uwoaaaaaa...! Hiii...! Hiii...! Fuuu...! N, a... AHHHHHH!"

A few months later, around the time of her 20th birthday.

The time of the birth finally came. Shirley didn't call for a midwife, she suffered alone in that abandoned hut, trying to bring a new life into the world.

The pain in her womb far exceeded any pain she remembered feeling in that torture chamber.

But still, she did it. Not even Shirley really understands just what pushes her to such lengths.

However, it was something instinctual that was forcing her to go through this.

"Haaah...! Haaaah...! Ah... It was born... It was... huh...?"

After a long labour, Shirley finally gave birth to twin girls.

Both with Shirley's hair, white as snow. The eldest twin had blue eyes, and the youngest bore crimson.

The cries from the two babies echoed around the small hut. And as those two little

hands grasped Shirley's fingers, tears began to fall from those two different coloured eyes.

"Ah... Uwaaaaaa...!"

Shirley cried.

The feeling she had that these children were a stain or a hinderance... Was completely replaced by overflowing love and affection.

Then she noticed. This nearly ended in tragedy for these girls so many times.

Recklessly swinging around a sword and fighting with these children inside her... When she thinks about how close she must have come to miscarrying, she shivers in horror.

And when thinking of leaving these two in an orphanage, she despairs.

Even if she accomplished her goal, it would mean nothing compared to the crime she'd be committing against her own children.

If she abandoned them now and walked the path of vengeance, fighting like someone possessed and taking joy in death, she could never turn back.

She wouldn't even be human anymore. She would just be a blood-crazed monster, living only instinctually on madness and hatred.

It was the warmth of those children who now gripped her fingers that pulled Shirley back from the brink, and she regained her humanity.

"If I don't protect them... These children, they won't have a future..."

All thoughts of vengeance were gone.

Finding a way to bring up these children was the only thing that mattered.

It doesn't matter whose blood runs in their veins. To guide and protect the two children she now held, nothing else was important. Wrapping them both gently in blankets, and despite the pain in her belly not yet having receded, Shirley finds the strength to leave the hut and begin her journey to the Empire's border.

There was no place for Shirley in the Empire anymore. She resolved to take her two daughters, and begin a new life in the neighbouring Kingdom.

Her social status gone, Shirley would walk the path of an adventurer, one filled with danger and peril. But even so, she'd do everything she can.

And although she feared that the nature she had resolved to leave behind might return someday, She still swore that until such a time, she would strive to let these girls grasp a happiness she never had. She would never let go of their hands.

It was in this way, Shirley who pledged to start a new life free from thoughts of murder and vengeance, arrived in a small frontier town within the Kingdom's borders. And then, ten years passed...

Chapter 1

The Demonic White Sword, Part 1

In this world, monsters that transcend human imagination run rampant.

From giant skeleton soldiers wreathed in flame to monstrous giant birds that roost atop thunderclouds to the wicked and indiscriminate curses of the Demon King's army.

Against such foes, it's only natural that humans who lack individual abilities would train relentlessly, take up weapons, and form parties in order to fight back.

And in that isolated frontier town, many such pioneering souls had gathered. The settlement had become crowded with ambitious young adventurers who wished to enhance their reputation, as well as the craftsmen who sought to earn their fortune selling them weapons and armour.

“Excuse me, I came to register as an Adventurer?”

A young squire of a magical knight enters through the door of the Adventurer Guild, which is given jurisdiction over this remote town and the surrounding area.

This brown haired boy is called Kyle. In order to help support the orphanage that had raised him as a young child, he sought to learn both sorcery and the blade. The only prerequisite to registering as an adventurer is to be of adult age... And as today was Kyle's 15th birthday, he finally qualified.

“Yes, I understand! Can I ask you to fill out your name and registration form?”

“Y-Yes!”

Receiving the document from the receptionist, whose flaxen hair was tied in a bundle behind her head and wore a professional smile, he filled in various fields such as his name, age, occupation, past illnesses and injuries, and so on.

“Finished, I'll hand this back.”

“A bronze guild tag... was it?”

In exchange for the document, he was handed a bronze tag engraved with a large “E”, the name of the guild branch they were in and a ten digit serial number.

“This will serve to prove your identity as an E-ranked Adventurer. E-rank is the lowest rank of adventurer, intended for novices and first-time fighters.”

Although guilds in different jurisdictions have their own customs and codes, one of the few things that was the same all over is the ranking system.

Divided into 6 stages as ranks S, A, B, C, D, and E, it was an easy way to identify the abilities and skill of an adventurer at a glance.

“Although you will be told this again if you ever reach such a rank, it’s important to note that S-rank adventurers who carry a golden token and A-rank adventurers who carry silver are obligated to always answer emergency requests. In a sense, the highest rank of adventurers who are truly free are those in B-rank, who carry copper tokens.”

“Interesting... I always thought that adventurers only received requests voluntarily, but I guess that’s not quite right?”

“Yes. As monsters spread throughout the world, they will only do more and more damage if they aren’t dealt with by high ranking adventurers as an emergency request.”

The receptionist then looked to the side and muttered something in a low voice.

“Well... lately there have been adventurers causing quite some trouble by trying to game the system...”

“Hmm? Did you say something?

“No, I didn’t say anything?”

The receptionist’s business like smile returned as if it had never vanished. She went on.

“Another important thing to keep in mind... Should anything ever go wrong out there, your identification tag may be the only way to identify you, so please take good care

of it."

"...Ah!"

Kyle stiffened at those words. He hadn't thought about it much, but the token he held was a firm reminder of just how intertwined adventurer work and mortal danger was. It would be a life under the constant shadow of death.

"That concludes your registration. I pray for your success, and expect to hear great things soon."

"T-thank you very much!"

"If you wish to take on a request, please take a request that matches your skill from the board and report back to reception."

On the request board that took up a large part of an adjoining wall, quests of all varying degrees of difficulty and urgency had been pinned up.

Being a novice, Kyle looks for an easy to complete request.

They ranged from harvesting herbs in the mountains to exterminating giant cockroaches in the sewers. Even unusual ones such as a request asking for volunteers to join the Novice Adventurer Training camp as aides in the new year, these were the kinds of jobs that were suitable for new adventurers.

"Hey, you. You aren't a newbie by any chance, are ya?"

As he fretted about which to pick, a frank voice spoke up from beside him.

Turning around, he saw a boy roughly the same age as him wielding a spear. Alongside him was a girl in the garb of a priestess and a beastman girl with a bow over her back.

Bronze tags hung from the necks of all three, and none of them had been adventurers for long either.

"We're all newbies as well, why not work together with us? We were about to take on a request as well."

"Eh!? T-that would be a great help... But, what request was it?"

“Goblin slaying. Isn’t that a go-to job for rookies like us?”

Goblins are known as some of the weakest monsters around, on the same level of slime. They possess the intellect and strength of a child.

But, they are infamously crafty to compensate. Although a lot of the times they only commit petty inconveniences like stealing gold coins that catch their eye or snatching crops, sometimes they have also been known to kidnap young women.

Goblin slaying requests are the most commonly posted quests on the board, and it seems that they’re never-ending.

It’s a common story to see a novice adventurer constantly taking goblin slaying requests in order to build up skill and experience.

And for Kyle, that kind of story appealed to him greatly.

“Okay, I guess I’ll go along with you all. Since this is my first time adventuring, it’s probably for the best that I group up, right?”

“Alright! If you’re ready to go, let’s leave soon!”

In this way, a balanced party of newcomers was formed. The spearman guarding the frontline, the archer and priestess in the rear, and the magic casting knight holding the center.

Both well balanced in roles and genders, it was an ideal party, without any need for further numbers.

“Ugh~, even if it’s only goblins, I still can’t help but feel nervous.”

“Don’t worry about it, they’re just goblins. I even drove one away when I was a child.

Even if the priestess girl seemed to be slightly anxious, the archer and spearman seemed confident and in good spirits.

Yes, just a weak monster that even children could drive away with sticks. Without any trepidation, they headed towards the forest where the monsters had been sighted.

Goblins typically set up their bases in abandoned ruins or cave systems, but this

request seems to indicate that the goblins had settled in an abandoned fort that was once used during wartime.

Exterminate the Goblins in the Abandoned Fortress. Requests like these really give you the feeling of being an adventurer. That feeling evaporated the moment they entered the fort.

“GAH!?”

With a dull thunk, something strikes the head of the beastman archer causing her to sink to her knees.

“A-are you okay!?”

“Where the hell did that come from!?”

The girl on her knees fainted and fell to the ground.

It happened so quickly. An ambush from the rear. A goblin behind the unconscious archer bore an ugly smile and laughed, brandishing the sling he had used to bring her down with a stone.

“G-Goblins!? How did they get behind us!?”

Instantly, Kyle rushed the goblin and slashed its stomach open, with its guts and bone exposed the small monster quickly expired.

“Gya gya gya gya gyaaaa!”

“Góbút! Gooooooh!”

Goblins appeared from every nook and cranny to surround them. Cudgels, stone axes, rusty blades, and old spears. Wielding a huge assortment of weapons, they menaced the group of adventurers.

“Shit! How dare you!!”

It was the spearman, enraged by seeing his childhood friend hurt, who lost his cool first.

Giving over to anger, he rushed the goblins, swinging his spear from side to side to pierce the goblin's bellies. In a stroke of good fortune, the fortress had mostly been cleared and was a wide open space where he could twirl that spear without striking walls or ceilings.

Kyle shields his back, slashing any goblin that tries to sneak up on him and using fire magic to take out goblins at a distance.

"Hang in there...! I'll heal you now!"

Protected by the other two, the priestess cradles the head of the archer and begins to apply healing magic. Although she didn't wake up, Kyle smiled to himself when he saw that the wound was closing up successfully.

After all, it's just goblins. Once the beastman archer wakes up, she and the priestess will be able to support them from the rear.

They shouldn't have any issue beating the remaining goblins this way. That unexpected incident will just be relegated to an unhappy memory, and they'll report a successful extermination to the guild.

If he was counting right, he'd already brought down ten goblins himself.

"GUOOOOOOOOOOOOOH!!"

"What the-!?"

Mixed into the din of battle, a huge roar that belonged to no goblin was heard, and as the spearman screamed a sound like a tree crashing to the ground rang out.

There appeared a monster the that was bigger than an ox Sporting scales from head to toe and a massive jaw, almost resembles a crocodile without hind legs.

"W-why...!? Weren't there only supposed to be goblins here!? W-why is a Dragon in such a place... WHY!?"

A dragon. A monster which has innumerable myths and legends attached to it. The kind of dragon before them is one that makes its home by burrowing through the earth.

Even if it is only a child, it's a child of the apex monster. E-Ranks wouldn't even be considered a fight.

"N-nooo! Stay back!!"

And, distracted by the dragon, the two adventurers in the front left a fatal gap in their formation.

The goblins rush past them to attack the two girls in the rear. Kyle began to cast a chant, but as he's thinking about whether or not to support the rear guard or the spearman in the front, he freezes up completely.

He is the ever-present midfielder, a magical knight. It is a complicated profession that maintains a balance between fighting with melee in the front and protecting those in the back with long-range spellcasting.

So, when it came down to it, he was unable to decide what to do. Whether to support the spearman against the earth dragon that bore down on him or the girls being rushed by the goblins, his indecision would be a regret that haunted him the rest of his life.

"Gy... Gyaaaaah...!"

"Gah...! Don't you dare...! Ah...!?"

He could have helped one or the other. But the opportunity had passed. The spearman's neck now lay between the dragon's fangs, and the priestess and archer fell under the cruel weapons of the goblins.

"Ah..."

Swallowed by madness. That's what adventurers call it.

When confronted with such cruelty beyond the bounds of human virtue, they are overwhelmed with a primal fear and cannot bring themselves to move.

It affects those most of all who have never had to witness anything like death or murder. It is a common thing for new adventurers filled with such virtue to simply break down in these situations, an unmoving and unresisting free meal for a monster.

“Haa...!? M-move, damn you...!”

The eyes of the earth dragon who still held the spearman dangling from its jaws looked towards Kyle, as did the surviving goblins with villainous smiles.

His party annihilated, he is alone. Against a gang of goblins he had arrogantly thought of as weaker than children, and an earth dragon far exceeding his strength.

It was an absolutely hopeless situation. Kyle who was rooted to the spot cut a pathetic figure, with tears and mucus running down his face, and urine pooling by his feet.

Is this how he was going to die?

Why are the goblins and the dragon not hostile to each other?

How did things come to this?

All they had come here to do was exterminate some weak goblins.

Not thinking about any way to get out of this situation, his mind settled on things that were now irrelevant. As the cackling goblins approached the young man who was trembling in fear...

“Gághá?”

“What...?”

The sharp sound of footsteps on stone pavement echoing from the bowels of the fort could be heard.

The monsters turned as one to look for the origin of the sound.

“Eh...? Ah...”

Kyle forgot his fear.

Every being in that place, regardless of race, was drawn in by that radiance.

It seemed like such a fleeting thing, utterly out of place in that blood-soaked yard.

A stunningly beautiful woman he didn't know, with flowing white hair.

Chapter 1

The Demonic White Sword, Part 2

Men sometimes referred to women in the language of flowers, but only for the woman who walked with such a beautiful posture did the gesture seem apt.

With differing scarlet and sapphire eyes, she looked at the death covered land before her, that fetching white hair gleaming in the sun.

As if the gods had seen fit to make her a canvas for all feminine beauty, her legs were also flexible and supple, and her bosom ample enough to tempt any man.

This woman, who only wore durable cowhide boots and a simply modest one-piece dress, was she a lady from town who had gotten lost?

To appear unarmed in such a dangerous place, Kyle thought that this person certainly couldn't be an adventurer.

“Gágggyaaaah!”

The goblins began to babble excitedly.

Surprisingly few people know just why they endeavour to kidnap young women. At the very least, Kyle himself doesn't know.

However, the kidnappings always follow a pattern... It's usually the women with softer features that are taken.

To that end, the woman in front of them was the perfect prey. Unlike those dangerous female adventurers who are skilled with weapons and magic, the goblins looked at this big chested woman who willingly walked into their nest as defenseless.

A voracious appetite obvious in they eyes, the goblins began to lick their lips.

“Ah... It's dangerous...! Y-you have to run...!”

He desperately tried to call out to the woman with his limp tongue, but it was already too late.

A goblin struck her with his club. A woman's face distorted in fear, taking a cruel blow from a goblin, and that white hair splayed across the dirty — Such was the expectation of every onlooker.

“...Eh?”

Instead, it is a brilliant red that fountains upward.

All that could be heard was the scream of a mortally wounded goblin, who was writhing in the dirt with a torso that was nearly split in two.

In the hands of a woman that appeared totally unarmed just moments ago, there was single edged sword that dripped with blood. Stepping over the soon-to-be corpse, she advanced on the scene.

“Gyagáhh!?”

Seeing his companion so easily cut down by that woman, one of the goblins quickly moved to take Kyle as a hostage.

Being at the bottom of the monster food chain in such an unforgiving world, goblins as a species had learned to be cautious above all else in order to survive.

And, as a result of experience, they knew that humans were weak to hostage situations.

But, as soon as the goblin held the tip of its rusted blade into the small of Kyle's back and demanded a surrender, the woman threw her sword and pierced the goblin's skull.

“Gyah!?”

“Góbúzaghl!?”

At such an ungodly lightning speed, no one's eyes followed her movement.

As the goblins shrank away from the sight of their compatriot's death, the woman

kicked off from the ground.

Holding swords of the exact same make in both hands, she cleaved the skulls, pierced the hearts and slashed the throats of all goblins before her.

An unparalleled white blur of carnage, extinguishing the life of these child sized demons one by one. She is like a storm, a blade of a war god that cuts down all in her path.

“GOOOOOOOOOOWAAAGH! GAAAAAH!!”

As the last goblin's head sailed through the air in an arc, the immature dragon begins to move.

Its huge maw was baring its razor sharp fangs that would chew through a human with ease, and as it leapt it meant to crush the woman with its massive forefoot.

“Much too slow.”

The woman brandished her sword first. The earth dragon's jaw is sliced through cleanly, as if it were no tougher than the necks of the goblins the blade had claimed before.



Kyle could only look on with child-like wonder at the woman who tore through those tough hide like paper, as if they those scales were no different to that of a fish.

It was then he noticed it. The copper token dangling from her neck.

(She's a B-Rank adventurer...!?)

If an E-Rank can be compared to a green novice, a B-Rank would be an adventurer with both skill and experience.

It seems like if you're strong enough to be a B-Rank, it's possible to even defeat a young dragon.

But, something disquieted Kyle. Although he was a novice himself, his trained intuition told him that there was something not quite right about this B-Ranked adventurer who had thrown herself into combat with abandon whilst dressed as a simple town girl.

“...Fu~n”

And strangest of all, those hands that had once gripped blades were now empty. Looking at the goblin that had tried to hold him captive, he saw that the sword that had pierced its skull had disappeared also.

On some level, as a practitioner of both swordplay and magic, Kyle understood that these were magically produced weapons.

However, as someone who was only capable of casting elementary level spells, he didn't truly understand it.

“...”

“Ah... Pl... Please wait!”

The woman who sought to leave quietly glanced at Kyle, who was still struggling to regain control of himself.

“...What is it?”

“Uh...”

Her eyebrows knotted in annoyance, the woman looked at Kyle with those differing eyes.

Standing at 160 centimetres, around the same height as Kyle, he withered under that gaze.

“Ah, um, for before... Thank you very much for saving me.

“I didn’t exactly help you out of the goodness of my heart. If I simply let a fellow adventurer die like that, the guild would be upset with me.”

Her beautiful voice didn’t match that bloodstained face, despite what she was saying.

Unable to withstand that gaze from the woman who seemed to be quite some years his senior, Kyle diverted his eyes. But despite his bowed head, he did his best to show his sincerity.

“Even so... it doesn’t change the fact that I’m only alive thanks to you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you very much.”

“Haaah...”

The woman looked down on Kyle with a wrinkled brow, but eventually let out a sigh as if someone had just drawn poison out of her.

“From the looks of it, you and a bunch of other novices came to this goblin nest only to get exterminated yourselves.”

“Ah...”

The two girls had died miserable deaths, and all that remained of the spearman was a bloodied hand gripping a broken spear.

If this woman hadn’t come, Kyle would have met with a similar fate.

“We just came to get rid of some goblins... But that dragon appeared out nowhere... Why!?”

A deep sense of regret runs through Kyle.

If only he had called for everyone to retreat as soon as the dragon appeared, perhaps things might have ended up differently.

"Well, this kind of thing is common."

"Eh?"

Kyle dumbfoundedly states at the woman, who said such a thing so flippantly.

"When you were young, do you not have memories of following the strongest child around? Or did you not have anyone like that?"

"Of course... As a kid I remember following around those big kids who led gangs of smaller ones around like henchmen... But what does that have to do with-?"

"Although when forced into a fight or flight situation, animals and monsters are virtually the same, monsters with intelligence comparable to a human's such as dragons or goblins will also have the option to obey or command." Simply put, it's like a symbiotic relationship. The place that you thought was a goblin's nest? In reality, it was the dragon's roost. That's all there is to it."

"B-but that's...!"

This goblin extermination request was from a neighbouring village.

The footprints found at the farms damaged in that village belonged to goblins, who could have imagined that a dragon lurked alongside them?

"Of course, I also thought that it was originally just a goblin's nest, but an adventurer should always be ready for unexpected encounters with monsters. In this case, it was simply your own lack of experience and knowledge that got you into this mess."

Such a severe way of speaking with little attempt to soften her words, but there was nothing he could answer her with. It was just as the woman said. The party had naively thought it to be a simple challenge, and once something unexpected happened they had completely fallen apart.

"Well then, since my business here is finished, I'm going to go on ahead. What you decide to do from here on out is up to you."

As soon as the woman turned her back on Kyle, who had been overwhelmed with trying to accept what he had just heard, the entire fort began to shake violently. It wasn't like an earthquake, it was as if something directly under the fort was moving.

"Damn."

"Uwaaah!?"

The woman clicked her tongue and grabbed Kyle with her outstretched arm. Even if he wanted to protest against being suddenly grabbed, that feeling evaporated instantly by what he heard next.

"GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!!"

An ear splitting roar erupted from below, as earth and rock seemed to explode out of the ground in a shower.

Kyle was almost deafened by the sound that was incomparable to the baby dragon from before, and was oblivious to the rocks that were falling overhead.

"Ah... Ahh!?"

Once he became aware, he viewed the falling rock hurtling towards him as if it were falling in slow motion. As he gaped, the white-haired woman grabbed the Kyle by the scruff of his neck and quickly scaled over the wall of the fortress.

"What is this... a joke...?"

The goblins who had hid from the massacre were wiped out by the fortress collapsing atop them, the rubble scattering everywhere.

Kyle, who had been thrown to the ground, looked upon a dragon that was the same size as the fort that had just disappeared beneath it.

This is no child, it is a full-grown dragon. Something that is only heard of in legends and stories, something no B-Rank adventurer could ever hope to defeat.

It is the job of the A-Ranked adventurers who seemed beyond human and the S-Ranked legendary heroes to tackle such a calamity.

"Just as I thought. When it went missing, I could have sworn it was a child that took it, but goblins... Seeing this, I guess it makes sense... Hey, is it that distressing to lose your child? I think I understand how you're feeling."

The woman who had seemed so majestic and full of pomp before now cut a miserable figure as she mumbled to herself.

"O-oh no...! Your arm...!!"

The woman's right arm was missing from the shoulder.

It had been severed as she had pulled Kyle out of that collapsing fortress.

Bleeding from the wounds that covered her body, her white dress and pale skin was covered in bloody splotches.

(This is my fault...! Because she tried to protect me...!)

How much misery could he go through in a single day?

After having people hurt and killed because of his faults, he finally beheld the end. If there really was something that pulled the strings of destiny, he'd want to beat him with all his might.

"It's... over..."

The dragon swung at the two of them with its mighty limb. The story would simply end here. They would be crushed by that dragon's power, and the life of a boy who was hit with a series of unfortunate events during his first adventure would end.

"Please don't decide to just end this so arbitrarily."

However, that dragon's strike never reached the ground.

Just like back in the fort, the wrist of the dragon was cut by a sword that had not been there before.

"GRYAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!?!?!"

The dragon screamed as blood fountained from the elegant cut.

As the dragon's severed wrist fell to the ground causing an almighty thud, the woman closed in on the dragon with a jump that seemed to ignore the weight of the sword she held. Aiming at its soft neck, she split its artery with one fell stroke.

"The only one whose story is over is the dragon's."

As the dragon began to fall, she plunged her sword back into its neck and blew its spine out through the scales on the nape of its neck, shattering it utterly.

"Ggg... hhh..."

No monster can survive with its spine severed. The legendary beast that seemed straight out of a storybook was killed so quickly it seemed like a joke, its giant body finally falling to the ground, motionless.

That novice adventurer didn't truly understand what he had just witnessed. The only thing he could say for sure was that this white-haired woman had fought a dragon alone, and slew it.

"W-What!? Your arm... How...!?"

The arm that should have been pulverized back in the ruins had returned to the woman as if it had never been injured at all.

She hadn't used healing magic, that much he was certain of. Even if he was inexperienced, if magic of that level was used near him he would have sensed it as a fellow magic user.

So, she healed herself without the use of magic? With this information, Kyle could only settle on one possibility.

"I-impossible... are you part immortal...!? That white hair... Those eyes... No way, are you...!?"

All living things are said to consist of mind, body, and soul.

He had heard of the existence of monstrous individuals with the ability to restore their own body by linking the soul directly to its body, but such thing was an extremely rare abnormality.

Whilst Kyle was an ordinary person, he still only knew of five beings said to have this ability. Because of how rare it was, stories and rumours about those who possessed it traveled the world over.

“The Golden Witch”, Canary.

“The Grand Dragon”, Aion.

“The Saint of Nirvana”, Hermes.

“The Phantom Thief”, Crowley Arsene.

And the rumour that the strongest warrior of all, someone whose blades wreaked havoc wherever they went, belonged to a remote adventurer’s guild.

A warrior with pointed eyes, one red and one blue. White hair that danced upon the battlefield, flashing like the edge of a sword in the eyes of her opponents. An unparalleled warrior, fit to be called a goddess of war.

“The Demonic White Sword”, Shirley. That was this woman’s name.

It’s a very common story.

A novice adventurer who takes a seemingly simple request, and never returns.

A lot of the time, it ends up being due to monsters subjugating other monsters.

A dragon that desires to hoard gold and silver will often command lower ranking demons to collect treasure for them.

Adventurers taking requests and meeting their doom inside these death traps is as regular a tale as you’ll ever hear working in the adventuring trade.

“Thank goodness, there doesn’t seem to be a scar”

Under the ruined fort lay the nest of the deceased. Shirley didn’t care to look at the treasures littering the place, but something else caught her eye.

She saw two pentagons made from cheap gold and silver coloured paper. Two stars made in that paper folding fashion that had come from the east, seem totally out of

place amongst all the glimmering treasure.

"Really, mistaking such things for treasure, having goblins as subordinates must have been really hard, huh?"

It didn't seem likely that the goblins had made these themselves.

On one of their treasure hunting episodes, the goblins must have snatched these thinking they were some gold and silver trinket.

That being said.

"Well, this is worth more than any treasure to me. Really, stealing the first birthday gift I ever got from those children. It would have been a shame if I had to wipe out the goblin race over something like that."

The goblins had pilfered these birthday presents from her room when she was out one day, and in order to get them back, she had been eradicating all the goblin nests in the area. There's no telling how far she would have gone to find them, even if she had to find every last goblin nest in the world.

Chapter 2

Mother and Daughters' Morning

As the snow melted away, spring arrived in the Kingdom.

Even in this frontier town, set against a backdrop of a savage wilderness, the first flower buds of the season that had forced their way through the cracks in the dry earth were beginning to bloom.

The adventurer lodgings they were staying at wasn't large, but it contained a bath and a dining room, and their room was spacious enough. Shirley, who had just woken up, glanced down at the two young girls who clutched her chest.

"...Really, you have your own beds, why do you climb into mine every single night?"

Did they simply come in here half asleep, or are they doing this on purpose? She sighed at the ten-year-old girls fast asleep on top of her.

However, contrary to her words, there wasn't a single hint of anger in her eyes. It was a tender, loving look.

"Alright, then."

The sun had risen, and its rays poured through the gap in the curtain.

Doing her best not to wake the two up, Shirley slowly wriggled out of bed and pulled the covers back over them, stroking their white hair which resembled her own.

The two of them resembled her strongly, except for those eyes which were hidden in slumber. Shirley relaxed only for a moment, before beginning her morning routine. Changing out of her sleepwear and washing her face, she proceeded to the dining room.

"Mornin', Shirley!"

"Good morning, Mrs. Martha."

The brown haired middle-aged woman with the exceptional physique who greeted her with an energetic smile was Martha, who ran the inn with her husband.

She turned forty-one just this year. Ten years ago Martha ignored the girl's blunt words and fierce look to take in Shirley, who is now tying an apron around her waist.

"Do you mind if I borrow the kitchen for a while?"

"No prob"

Deficit House¹ is a small and beautiful inn for traveling adventurers and is successful despite its name.

In the corner of the kitchen sitting silently was Martha's husband's grandfather... He must have been a fan of irony when he named this place as a founder.

The inn caters to adventurers who do not have permanent lodgings in the town for a monthly fee and also offers meals for additional costs. Adventurers who cannot afford to or do not wish to pay for meals are provided space in the kitchen to prepare their own food.

"Even if it's you, aren't ya tired? You were out all day yesterday crushing those goblin nests, so you should eat with us for once."

"No, I'm not particularly tired, it was just a regular day."

"Oh well, I suppose you know best then."

Fried eggs on toast, with a side of smoked fish salad. The typical morning menu. When she first started cooking, she would injure herself constantly, but now after ten years of experience, she's grown used to it.

"In addition to fighting every day, I really admire that you still find time to make meals for those two, y'know. It's not the normal kind of attitude you get from adventurers."

Battling day in and day out against monsters and villains. There aren't many adventurers who can do that and not be physically and mentally drained outside of work.

As Martha said, typically adventurers will do their best to laze around and relax in the

cafeteria for that reason when they're not on a job, not giving much thought to making food for themselves.

Actually, among all the residents, Shirley is the only one who uses the kitchen. And it's a rare day that she won't use it at all.

"...Because our lives are hanging in the balance every day."

Keeping an eye on her work, Shirley mutters.

"In this kind of world, whether you're an adventurer or a normal person, you never know when your time is going to come. I just want to do my best with what time I do have."

She blushed a little because it was embarrassing to say, but it was what she honestly felt.

It's true that there were many safer jobs than her current line of work. However, since advancing through the novice ranks, she was now earning enough to keep her family in relative comfort compared to other households.

It's not only the problem that she would earn less money, but the nature of adventurer work when weighed against safer professions, is that she can choose her own hours, and is able to spend more time with her daughters.

And above all that, Shirley is still a wanted criminal in the Empire. Fortunately, there is no extradition treaty between the Empire and the Kingdom, but a vagrant woman who has no desire to disclose her personal history is not exactly the most desirable hire.

(I really did miscalculate though, didn't I?)

When registering as an adventurer, there are no inquiries into personal circumstances, be it vagrancy or criminal history. As such, being an adventurer was really the only path open to Shirley from the beginning.

However, she purposefully stays at B-Rank, since she's worried her name is beginning to spread around too much.

(Even if it sounds arrogant, to me it really is a big problem.)

Martha beams at her answer.

In the nine years Shirley and Martha have known each other, Shirley hasn't seemed to age a day. But Martha has always seen her as a mature mother for moments like these.

"Mama, Mrs. Martha, morning~"

"Ah! Morning, Sophie!"

"Good morning."

While Martha was admiring Shirley with warm eyes, two girls with white hair had entered the dining room.

Unlike Shirley's sharp gaze the first girl had gentle blue eyes, the beautiful eldest twin, Sophie.

There's already plenty of adventurers in the dining room, and of course, their eyes turn to look. Especially the men. Even though they're young, that innocent beauty that's a reflection of their mothers isn't diminished because of their youth. It's only natural people would stare.

"Jeez, Tio! Stop leaning on me, walk on your own!"

"Nn... Morning, Mum."

"And a good morning to you as well, Tio."

The younger sister being dragged into the dining room by Sophie is Tio, who has difficulty getting up in the morning.

If the elder sister could be compared to an angel, she would be like a fairy. Unlike her mother and elder sister, her sleepy red eyes weren't quite as striking, but in every other aspect, she didn't lose to her elder sister in terms of charm and beauty. Together with her quiet personality, she seems like a character straight out of a fairy tale.

"Please wait just a little longer, it will be ready soon."

"Ah, then I'll get the dishes!"

“Oh, please do.”

Seeing the two girls take the initiative to help their mother, Martha patted them on the head as an encouragement.

“Ah, you two are such great little helpers! My word, if only my own daughters took lessons from you!”

Martha has two sons and two daughters. Both the sons are independent and are currently gaining experience to someday take over the inn, but her daughters are both wastrels only good at spending more money than they have.

Thanks to having such daughters, Martha and her husband endlessly dote on Sophie and Tio. Since the girls also love them both, Shirley always feels at ease leaving them in their care when she needs to work.

“No, it’s nothing special, you know.”

“...That’s embarrassing...”

While Sophie and Tio were being praised, Shirley nearly snorted with pride, thankfully no one noticed.

Whatever trivial thing it may be, there’s no mother who wouldn’t be happy to see her daughter praised.

Even if someone considered her overreacting or being silly, she didn’t care, she was just happy that people saw her daughters in such a way.

That being said, she wasn’t about to start bragging. In a desperate attempt to keep her dignity as a mother intact, Shirley fought tooth and nail to suppress a goofy smile as she quietly prepared breakfast.

“Well then, dig in.”

“Yeah!”

“Thank you for the food.”

It was an out of place scene in such an inn.

Some would call the inn's dining room neat and minimalist, but more honest people would call it modest and plain. Yet every morning, in the same corner of the room, those three beauties with white hair would have their breakfast and draw the eye of every adventurer in the room.

To an onlooker who didn't understand their circumstances, the sight of these three taking their meal felt picturesque.

Even when just having breakfast, the beauty of those three caused women to stare in envy and men to gaze in admiration.

With the dining table bathed in the light from the window above, it looked like a painting created by a master artisan. This gentle scene came to an end on Tio's account.

"Oh yeah, that boy in class who confessed to Sophie yesterday, are you dating him now?"

"Fueee!?"

At that moment, the dining hall... No, the whole inn was plunged into a strange combination of icy murderous intent and fiery passion.

Even back in the rooms, the adventurers throughout the whole building felt pressure like they were about to fight a terrible foe.

Those still asleep sprang to their feet in fright at the sudden sensation, as the adventurers desperately tried to figure out where this was all coming from.

The one place they never considered was that the murderous intent being radiated throughout the building was coming from that peaceful breakfast scene in the corner.

"W-w-w-why do you know about that!?"

"It was an accident. I just happened to see it. Thinking that no one would ever go to the back of the schoolhouse was a big mistake."

"...Hmmm... Is that so...?"

The source of that murderous intent, whose low murmur disguised that her voice rang

from the depths of hell, was none other than Shirley.

Even though the adventurers are shuddering under the pressure, the two young girls aren't affected at all.

Trying to figure out why on earth she was so angry, the braver adventurers pricked up an ear to try and listen in.

"I said no, anyway. I didn't really know that boy well..."

"Hmm... I thought I might get in the way if I stayed so I left early, but I was worried about nothing."

".....Haa."

The killing intent suddenly dissipated.

Wondering if the Demonic White Sword had calmed down, the adventurers tried their best to steal a glance.

"Anyways, Tio, I saw you get a love letter as well! Now it's your turn, right?"

"Muu... so you saw..."

And we were back to square one.

Deficit House was awash in a murderous rage that threatened to collapse the building yet again. This time the occupants were visited by fleeting visions of white calamity hacking and slashing through everyone present, and they began to panic.

"So? Who was it?"

"Kevin in first grade."

"Ohhh! He's really popular with the girls! So, are you going out now...?"

"I still haven't replied."

The palpable bloodthirstiness becomes even thicker as the story goes on. At this point, half of the adventurers had fainted.

“...I see. There was such a boy? As a parent, I'll have to do something.”

The voice that muttered that had a frightening implication.

Her daughters were the cutest things in the whole world. It only makes sense that they would be popular amongst the other children, and they'd want to form a special relationship.

When this sort of thing happened, the father would typically be opposed whilst the mother would want to watch over the relationship with a gentle eye.

((((BUT THAT FATHER IS ABSOLUTELY NO GOOD ! ?))))

However, in the case of this mother, it seems like the positions are completely reversed.

The adventurers are trying to finish their meals as quickly as possible and evacuate, but the food is getting stuck in their throats.

Finally, at this late stage, some of the adventurers begin to pray. But the end of this drama came as quickly as it had begun.

“I'll refuse, anyways. I can't really think of anyone like that right now. For me, it's just mum.”

“Ehehe, me too!”

At the moment the two hugged both of Shirley's arms from either side, the murderous intent vanished once more. But instead of being replaced by an aura of happiness, it was a pleasant bashfulness.



"Ah, you two, stop it! Not at the table!"

""Yeees!""

Even if she was trying to sound dignified and strict, the words came out in an embarrassed sounding high pitch.

The demon who in the eyes of the adventurers seemed like she was going to swallow the world whole had been replaced with a silly doting mother who was smiling despite herself at her daughters.

Later on, rumours began to spread that the residents of Deficit House had developed an unexplainable resistant to demonic auras, but that's a story for another time.

Chapter 3

To the Adventurers Guild

As Shirley was once involved in politics at the highest level in her homeland, it's inevitable that she'd always have her thoughts about the various systems and laws in other countries.

Among all the governments and private businesses in the world, for her the Adventurers Guild is amongst the best when it comes to such bureaucracy.

Although the Kingdom's laws do not forbid vagrants and refugees from becoming citizens, it demands a gold coin per head to be able to create a family register.

Three gold coins for three people. It's a sum that is comparable to completing two or three rookie requests from the Adventurers Guild.

Who you are and where you're from don't matter, when you pay the fee and create a new family register, you're treated as if you're a brand new person.

But, just being registered isn't enough to find employment. Due to a desire to keep up the explosive uptake in literacy in the past two hundred years, one needs to prove they were able to read and write in order to be eligible for a job.

And to prove that, you needed certification. Either by attending a seminar for adults or as a child having attended school between your 9th and 12th years.

But, no matter whether you attend the seminar or a private school, both cost money.

Naturally, the destitute who would benefit most from being taken in by the country were the ones who had no means to pay for either the family registry or the subsequent education.

And because they cannot work, are they supposed to just die in the streets? It was the Adventurers Guild that responded to that question.

Whilst they ran the risk of living in constant peril working a profession not covered by

any government benefits, in return they could work with no sort of entry fee to register and no background checks.

As a result, although there are many adventurers who travel the world seeking fortune and fame, there is also a number who simply seek to earn the coin to create a family registry and pay the education costs.

However, in saving such vagabonds, the Guild found themselves directly at odds with government policy.

The Guild and the Kingdom clashed politically constantly over this issue, but recently the Kingdom has begun to exercise tacit acceptance of the Guild due to financial issues.

Although publicly the Guild and the government agree on regulations and laws, and that is generally true when it comes to emergency requests, the differences between the two parties mean that the Guild has become a hotbed for criminals and the stateless.

It Shirley, and her daughters Sophie and Tio, who are beneficiaries of this gap in the system.

She originally only planned on pursuing adventuring work as a short-term solution, but unexpectedly the way it panned out meant that Shirley had a lot more time to spend with her daughters than if she worked a regular job. The quick earnings helped her feed Sophie and Tio well and since last year they have been attending a private school, so she has no plans to quit any time soon.

“Okay, Mama! I’ll see you later!”

“Yaaawn~, see you...”

“Have a great day, you two.”

Sophie waves cheerfully as she looks behind her, whilst Tio looks like she wants to go back to bed.

Carrying notebooks and pencil cases in their small satchel bags, the only way you could tell them apart was by looking at their eyes or at their hair.

Sophie, who is always trying to be mature beyond her years, styles her hair into an

adult-like single braid which she wears down her front.

The opposite of her older sister when it comes to caring about looks, Tio only wears a single hairpin.

Although it can't match the length of Shirley's hair which reaches her waist, the girls' hair which reaches slightly below their shoulder blades glimmers as they walk.

"Fuu... Alright, time to go."

"Yes, have a safe trip... Is what I would say if you hadn't just made a god damned scene in my inn!"

After seeing off her daughters as part of her daily routine, Shirley turned around to see Martha wearing a frightening expression.

"I have about 20 adventurers unconscious in my dining room, some of them with bubbles still foaming around their mouths! If you think you're just going to wander off without helping..."

"Uu..."

Shirley, who had unintentionally caused several adventurers to faint because of being unable to control her magical aura, hung her shoulders and pouted.

Unlike those adventurers either unconscious or close to it, Martha and her husband were completely fine. Maybe they had just grown used to thing kind of thing from prolonged Shirley exposure over the years? It's best not to think too much about it.

"I'm sorry... It's just when I think of those pests buzzing around my girls, I..."

"Pests..."

About her daughters' classmates, Shirley described them as irritating insects as if it were natural.

"That's right... Those kids, when they get to that age they just..."

"Unbelievable. That was the cause of all this? If you're too overbearing with girls, they'll grow up to hate you."

"E-even if I seemed a little flustered, I'm still going to respect my daughters' independence...!"

Although she denied it, it was easy to tell by that less than persuasive voice and gloomy face that Martha had hit the bullseye.

"I just... think it's too early for them to be getting involved in things like romance. If we were still nobles I'd understand because of the political reasons, but..."

"Bah, if anything, one or two boys confessing is much too little! With how beautiful those girls are, there should be twenty boys lining up every day to express their love!"

"TWENTY!?"

After living two-thirds of her life as a noble, Shirley had devoted every waking moment of the rest of it to her daughters.

One or two boys? She hated the idea of it, but she might have learned to live with it. But the idea of boys lining up around the block to court her daughters disturbed her so much that she reached for the hilt of a sword without realizing it.

"Wait wait wait wait! Why are you suddenly going with a sword in hand!?"

"It's a mother's duty...! To protect her daughters from danger... and if needs must... to exterminate...!"

"Ah, jeez! Calm down! You're meant to be going to the guild soon and you STILL haven't helped me with the adventurers you nearly DID exterminate!"

"Uu..."

Shirley, who was about to break into a run in the direction of the school, freezes in place hearing that.

She had known Martha for nearly ten years. Although in the beginning, she didn't want to involve herself with anyone, Martha forced her to get along with that extroverted personality of hers. What's more, Shirley had never once won an argument with that woman.

"Don't worry so much about those girls at school, the teachers will watch over them.

Besides, those children are sturdy enough to take care of themselves. I don't want your selfishness getting in the way of their school lives, do I make myself clear?

"I-I understand... I'll do as you say... Sorry for the inconvenience..."

"Well, so long as you understand. What do you plan to do, then?"

"If anyone approaches my daughter, I'll put the fear of god into them with an aura of bloodlust."

"Wow... Well, I'd really prefer you to just be peaceful about it, but so long as you don't break any laws, I guess it's all right?"

Shirley helped Martha rouse the unconscious adventurers in the dining hall. Martha sighed as a burly adventurer screamed in panic and fled the room as Shirley tried to help him to his feet.

"And you guys call yourselves adventurers?"

Although this kind of thing had happened sometimes when she imagined some non-existent threat to her daughters, this is the worst incident so far.

Whilst Martha prayed that such a thing will never happen in her inn again, her husband emerged from the kitchen with a massive rolling pin.

"So, who is the bastard who tried to court Sophie and Tio?"

"You as well!?"

Martha smacked her equally overbearing husband upside the head with a bang.

To adventurers who are constantly in the front lines of battle, armour is of the utmost importance.

When it comes to armour such as gauntlets, chainmail, and breastplates, some adventurers like to wear protection made from lighter material. But wearing heavier armour can stop one from instantly dying to a blow from a strong monster.

However, in order not to obstruct her arms and legs, all that the pride of the guild “Demonic White Sword” armours herself with is a sleeveless shirt of chainmail.

Aside from her sturdy boots, the only other thing she wears is a simple looking one-piece dress over the top of her chainmail. To the inexperienced eye, she would never seem like an adventurer.

“Hahh...”

Opening the heavy wooden door to the adventurer’s guild and depositing the unconscious fully armoured giant man in a chair, the adventurers who inside turned to look at her.

There was a tavern connected to the general reception area and like in the songs of yore it was full of musclebound warriors eating meat off the bone and drinking dwarven ale, though these men all turned to look at the women who had just walked in.

Woah. It’s the Sword Demon.

Even Shirley couldn’t discern who was talking about her in this din.

Ignoring their whispers and gazes, Shirley made her way to the reception area.

“And so, I bravely decided to attack the bandit’s fortress head on! Whilst I took on all the bandits myself, my friends attacked them from the rear with magic! It was a really big brawl!”

“Woooow. That must have been really tough.”

“The opponents arrayed against me numbered ten! But, not to be a braggart, my sword was more than enough for that lot!”

“Is that so? Anyways, if you’d excuse me, I need to get back to my paperwork...”

The copper tagged adventurer wielding a buster sword on his back waxed lyrical about his latest achievements in the field to the receptionist with flaxen hair, who seemed deeply uninterested.

In such a squalid and remote Guild, the numbers of men trying to pluck the rare flower

in their midst aren't small.

But to the receptionist, it's just an annoying distraction from work, as she's trying to prepare the day's requests.

"Excuse me. I have business here, so if you're finished here could you please leave?"

"Geh!? It's you..."

The lecherous adventurer who just a moment ago had been trying to chat up the receptionist now scowled at the peerless beauty who stood in front of him.

"What is it?"

"...Bah."

Withering under the those sharp disparately coloured eyes, the adventurer with the slightly contradictory attitude towards women clicked his tongue and walked off.

The receptionist who was ostensibly smiling on the surface, whilst sticking out her tongue towards the back of the man internally, gave a small bow of the head to her rescuer, Shirley.

"My apologies for needing rescuing."

"I only spoke up because I had a reason. The guild had something they wanted to discuss with me, right?"

"Ah, yes. You're right, but I can't tell you here. Please wait in the parlour for a moment."

After seating Shirley down in the small parlour behind the reception area, the receptionist quickly trotted down the hall to retrieve the relevant documents. But when she went back into the room, she stopped in her tracks.

Despite them both being women, she was utterly charmed. Despite drinking tea made from cheap leaves off an aged wooden table, all her refined gestures and mannerisms made it look like Shirley was having an exquisite tea party for one.

"Yumina, aren't you going to sit down?"

"Ah, right away!"

She held a certain respect for that elegant woman who was so different from all the other adventurers. Whenever Shirley was at the reception desk, sometimes she would simply accept a request by gazing at Yumina with those eyes.

"Sorry about that... Um, anyways, the reason we called you here is to do with the goblin extermination the other day."

"...If this is going to be a lecture about me muscling in on someone else's request, isn't it guild policy that intervening in goblin hunts doesn't count as doing that?"

"No, that's not the problem. The problem is that there was a dragon lurking in what was supposed to only be a goblin nest."

Shirley tilted her head.

"Sure, a dragon itself is rare, but it shouldn't be a surprise that it was living together with goblins. Since they were both relatively high intelligence monsters, it makes sense they would coexist like that."

"That's not the whole picture. Recently, there have been three similar incidents of dragons leading packs of monsters such as goblins and dire wolves that our guild was asked to subdue."

Dragons, said to be the monster to bring unparalleled honour to its vanquisher if subdued, are the rarest of all monsters.

It is incredibly strange that four dragons would be sighted in the same area in very similar circumstances.

"That said, this could all be coincidence. But, if there is actually some larger phenomenon at work here, then the Guild will have no choice but to gather all the A-Rank or higher adventurers here in order to seek out the root cause. We can't have any more pointless deaths."

Shirley recalled that group of young adventurers who were decimated because of the appearance of a dragon the other day.

If the same thing happened again and again, it would certainly be a tragedy. The

profession of adventuring might even be wiped out in this area.

“And so, Ms. Shirley.”

“I refuse.”

“But I haven’t said anything yet!?”

“Were you going to attempt to promote me to A-Rank?”

“Ugh... That’s not wrong, but...”

The Guild’s hopes were obvious from the beginning. Going by guild rules, a B-Rank adventurer isn’t obligated to accept any request no matter how urgent, so they desperately want to promote her to A-Rank.

“It sure is nice to be thought of as someone worthy of A or S rank, but to put it bluntly, the real issue is that the army is in a state of emergency. With the world in the state that it is, just how many emergency or calamity-class requests are being issued on a weekly basis?”

For Shirley, when it comes to deciding between fulfilling endless emergency requests and spending time with her daughters, the choice is obvious.

Not to mention the anxiety she would feel having to be away from them for long stretches of time.

For someone who values her daughters far more than the fame one can win by killing high ranking monsters, the demerits Shirley would face for becoming an A-Rank would be far too steep.

“No way... Please don’t turn down such a promotion! What will people say about our chapter if our top-ranked adventurer is stuck in B-Rank forever!?”

“I don’t really know much about that kind of thing. Besides, I don’t actually fulfil the conditions for A-Rank promotion, do I?”

“Guh...”

In times of crisis, adventurers are supposed to be able to team up as partners or

parties to tackle difficult foes, so both results and levels of cooperation in attaining them are taken into consideration for potential A-Rank adventurers.

As such, only adventurers who have been thoroughly screened as capable of working in a team and who don't cause trouble for other party members are eligible.

"Even if it might be a bit much to say this myself, don't you think it would be a bit rude to the other adventurers who tried so hard if someone who only ever took requests solo was promoted to A-Rank unfairly?"

"T-then, why not join a party~..."

"If there are any adventurers who were willing to fight alongside me, I would party with them, regardless of their rank."

It should be said straight away that Shirley is neither a misanthrope or a man-hater.

But because of the deep suspicions she has for unfamiliar people due to the tragic betrayals of her past, she tends to be incredibly blunt with new faces and is treated with a sense of antipathy by many other adventurers because of this.

Moreover, as she's obviously well beyond a B-Rank in terms of strength, anyone who would take a request with her around that rank would feel emasculated and useless in comparison.

"Anyways, if you need me to survey the area for you, just attach a request to the noticeboard. If the timing is convenient, I might accept it."

"If the circumstances were convenient than that would be great, but I can't guarantee they would be... ah."

Shirley took a final sip of her black tea and left the parlour, without even giving Yumina a glance of that accepting gaze.

Chapter 4

Omen

“Sorry for the wait. Please come in, Miss Shirley.”

“Yes.”

Half an hour before evening fell, and after she had taken the head of an Ogre General that had threatened to attack the town, Shirley entered the back room of the church behind the Adventurers Guild that was being borrowed as a meeting room.

“Thank you for your hard work. Please, take a seat.”

A man from the Guild is seated next to a priest in the room, with a large amount of paperwork on the table in front of them.

A simple way to describe the work these men do is to ensure that requests that are reported as completed were actually finished.

Unlike simple requests such as procuring precious metals or medicinal herbs, any requests involving the subjugation of monsters or demons must be verified with a priest present.

“...<<Truth • Penetrate>>... We’re ready to begin. Whenever you’re ready.”

Following his brief chant, the Priest holds out his short staff, the tip of which has begun to glow.

The clerical magic that is used in service of the goddess known as the Ethereal Mother has many practical applications, ranging from the healing of wounds to the lifting of curses, and is employed in many various professions ranging from adventuring to the government.

The time, the priest used a magic known as “Sense Lie” to distinguish truth from falsehood.

The guild doesn't accept trophies like horns or ears as proof of a request being completed. And it goes without saying that adventurers walking through town with freshly severed heads would raise far too many eyebrows.

It is simply much easier to ascertain the truth using magic like this, rather than relying on physical proof that in some cases may be far too heavy to bring back to town in the first place.

"Then, please make your report, if you would."

"Today's request was to eliminate an ogre whose territory had begun to gradually expand towards town, as well as the subjugation of all the monsters subordinate to him. Aside from the ogre itself, I also exterminated 24 goblins and 13 dire wolves. As far as I'm aware, none escaped."

As Shirley disinterestedly relays the information without pause, the priest nods his head intermittently.

"...I swear in the name of the Ethereal Mother that her words contain no treachery."

"Understood. Well done out there, Shirley. Now, as per usual, please take this back with you."

With their business over, Shirley was handed a report that bore a red insignia of an intertwined sword and wand... the emblem of the Guild.

Handing this over to reception officially completed a request, and the adventurer is paid on the spot. This kind of multi-stage reporting hasn't been around forever, it was implemented in the early stages after multiple instances of adventurers fraudulently claiming to complete requests.

"I've completed the request."

"Thank you for your hard work! Defeating the Ogre solo, that means you get the whole reward intended for an entire party!"

After glancing sidelong at the queue of adventurers waiting to chat up Yumina behind her, Shirley quickly confirmed the reward and left without staying to talk.

As she walked home, the afternoon sky slowly turned a shade of madder red, the

setting sun still illuminating the bright streets. The request was finished sooner than she expected, and she enthusiastically thought about what she was going to make her girls for dinner.

After dropping off the requested reward at the inn, she went back out without even giving her feet time to rest, towards the hustle and bustle of the markets that were still operating with what little light remained in the day.

Whilst the production of armour, weapons, enhancement drugs and curative potions were very active in this frontier town, the food supply was comparatively scarce.

Although there are pastures around the town, they can't cover all the demand alone. The only way to supply this frontier town with enough food to survive is to import from nearby cities and rural areas, which would inevitably run up the cost... If it weren't for the Guild heavily subsidizing the merchants who make the trip.

Because of that, the food is cheaper here than the place it was made in.

"This cheese sure is cheap, isn't it?"

Mixed in amongst the housewives jostling for the cheapest goods, the beautiful woman with the white hair and the mismatched eyes seemed incredibly out of place.

Completely ignoring the stares of passers-by, she passes between one stall to the other looking for bargains.

"Huhu..."

Shirley's mouth twisted in a stupid looking grin as she has her arms full of bags containing various vegetables, cheese and a chicken, purchased with some of the coins earned from today's battle.

Flour and eggs were available for use at the inn. Last time was a beef stew, Sophie's favourite meal. So today's dinner is going to be Tio's favourite, a meat pie.

Going to a marketplace, buying ingredients and thinking up recipes for her daughters... It's not a life she could have ever imagined as a noblewoman or a fiancée of the Crown Prince.

But just thinking of her daughter's happy faces was always enough to get her through

the day.

“Ah! Mama!”

Sophie came running up from behind her as she was walked home with her shopping.

“Welcome home! Is today’s job already over?”

“Yes. Tio isn’t with you?”

“Nope. She said she had to do something.”

Reminded of the events of this morning, Shirley’s demonic side began to slip out just a bit, but in a panic she suppressed it.

If it’s her daughter’s choice, she doesn’t have any right to interfere...

“Ah, is that tonight’s dinner?”

“That’s right, I was thinking of making a meat pie.”

“Boo... Stew would be better.”

Even though she was somehow tempted to accept by those big blue puppy dog eyes as Sophie joked, her desire to be fair as a mother let her reject her beloved daughter’s request.

“We had stew yesterday, so tonight it’s going to be Tio’s favourite.”

“I guess it can’t be helped... As the older sister, I’ll have to be kind.”

“Well then, would you be so kind as to take one of these bags?”

The scene of the mother and daughter walking side by side, the light of the setting sun reflecting off their white hair. With their common clothes and gentle looks, they looked like a normal happy family.

Apart from their stunning beauty, they were just a cheerful family you could find anywhere. If you didn’t know them, you would never think that mother was a warrior who had bathed in the blood of monsters not a few hours ago.

“Ah.”

Sophie stopped all of a sudden. Along the row of shops, Sophie was staring at shop that sold various ornaments and jewellery.

“Is there something about that store?”

“Eh!? Ah, no, there’s nothing!?”

“...”

As they walked past the shop window, Shirley didn’t miss the jade inlaid rosary that was laid out as a showpiece.

If Sophie had wanted to buy a simple decoration for school, she could have afforded it, since she was given a gold coin per month as pocket money... But it seemed like she yearned for the genuine article.

(By the way, in the Kingdom, wasn’t there a custom when one became an adult...)

Although Shirley doesn’t know about all the details as someone born in the Empire, in the Kingdom there is a custom of giving your child or student in magical and martial arts an engraved gift bearing their name when they come of age.

Something that they can hold onto and remember you by even when separated. Wanting to send blessings to those who had moved away from home, some people went as far as to send newly engraved items to those young adults every year.

(...Maybe it would be best to prepare early?)

Shirley makes her decision.

It’s not wise to commit to expenses so far in the future when you can’t be sure of what’s going to happen even tomorrow.

But, for those two lovely daughters who she went through such hardships to bring into the world, she would spare no expense.

(I’ll gather all the materials myself, and recruit the greatest craftsmen in the country... It will be the ultimate declaration of motherly love...!)

Even though simple wooden or store bought items would usually do, the adventurer known as the Demonic White Sword swore that her daughters would only have the best of everything.

Not even the most obsessive nobleman in the world would go over the craftsman's head to source all the materials himself, but unfortunately, there was no one around to point it out.

(For now, I should aim for Jewelsaad Mine... Though didn't Yumina say that was one of the locations that a Dragon had been witnessed?)

Shirley imagines a receptionist tearfully accepting a request completion like it's the greatest thing to ever happen to her.

Jewelsaad Mine could be described as a natural treasure chest, containing much of the kingdom's natural supply of precious gems and rare metals.

But because of its remoteness and cavernous depths, it has become a breeding ground for numerous and apparently a dragon, so in truth, no one can claim ownership of it.

Even though every merchant, noble and member of the royal house desires nothing more than to claim ownership over the treasures in the mountain, because of the difficulties involved they have no choice but to ask adventurers to collect them.

(And to top it off, there's a guild reward to gain as well... What a stroke of luck. I'll take the request tomorrow morning, and then go mine some gems... And I suppose I'll kill the dragon after all.)

For Shirley, the whole dragon business really isn't a priority. As her mother has her finger on her mouth contemplating her busy day tomorrow, Sophie tilted her head to the side and asked:

"Mama? You've been quiet for a while?"

"Ah, don't worry, it's nothing."

Wanting to keep the surprise, Shirley entered back into the inn with her daughter.

As night came and the number of adventurers lining up slowly dwindled to nothing, Yumina closed up shop for the day with a heavy sigh.

Today she got chewed out by the regional guild boss. ‘Why on earth have you not promoted the Demonic White Sword to A-Rank when she’s at the apex of all swordsmen!?’ or something to that effect.

Usually, the guild respects the decisions of its members, and so there’s a lot of strong warriors buried in B-Rank who have no wish to be promoted and lose their freedom.

Although Shirley considered herself just another one of those B-Rank freedom lovers, the guild can’t simply ignore a person who makes elite A-Rank parties look like jokes by defeating calamity class monsters like Dragons on her own. The guild was beginning to put an unreasonable amount of pressure on Yumina to get the promotion finalized.

“Ahhh jeez... Even though I’m really trying my best, do they have any idea how stubborn that person is!?”

Yumina repeated a curse in her mind that she hopes will make the regional boss suffer premature balding.

(But, honestly, there is some truth to what the boss is saying.)

Even if she isn’t a mother herself, as a fellow woman she can sympathize with Shirley wanting to spend as much time with her daughters as possible.

However, the Adventurers Guild is an organization dedicated to saving people, and to do that it needs skilled warriors it can rely on to respond to emergencies.

Yumina has known Shirley for more than five years, ever since she was assigned here, and she’s been in B-Rank the entire time.

Shirley who slew the Mad Black Dragon that dwelt in the mountains, took the head of the Dread Vampire Princess, and cleared through the dungeon that was deemed impossible, she did all these things alone. Yumina felt deep admiration for the woman who accomplished all that.

No matter how impatient the guild was to promote Shirley, even if she did meet the party related qualifications for A-Rank promotion, there’s still the issue of her complete unwillingness to advance.

(I hope she at least joins a party someday, though.)

But Shirley's capacity for cooperation seems incredibly low, and even if she did her best to conceal that attitude of hers, it's not as if she has many acquaintances to call on.

She rarely ever talks to other adventurers and has never been invited to join a party herself. And that's only natural.

No matter how amazing someone's abilities and looks are, to adventurers having someone with little regard for teamwork in your party is the same as having a death wish.

No party would want to ruin themselves by adding such an unstable element to the mix. It's a hard sell if you see it from their point of view.

However, she'll still encourage Shirley to try and join a party. Perhaps if she can be guided towards fulfilling the requirements to become an A-Rank adventurer, with enough persistence she might also agree to the promotion.

That's what Yumina hopes to achieve.

"An adventurer who could work and get along with Shirley... Who isn't already in a party... All right."

Even though business hours for the Guild had already finished, she was the one in charge of locking up tonight. So there's no one there to complain about her leaving late.

Yumina brought out a magic tool from behind the counter. It was a magical amplifier connected by a string that allowed one to talk to someone else with a similar device many miles away.

"Hello, good mor- Wait, that's not it. Guild Master? Yes, there's something I needed to ask your permission about..."

Chapter 5

The Fresh-Faced Adventurer from Before

The world is inherently a cruel place.

When monsters rampage in such monsters, and sometimes with uncanny intelligence, your instincts tell you that mankind should be little more than a prey animal.

It isn't the knights and adventurers who are typically the ones who lose out in this food chain, it's women and children who have no means to protect themselves.

Things like ethics and morals are irrelevant to them. Rather the sound of screams and sensation of tearing into soft flesh... It's obvious why monsters would prefer the easier victim.

That's why that small monster watches the soft looking child, and waits for the moment he's separated from the adults to strike.

The screaming and crying echoes. And is followed by the sound of meat being shredded. The little children who don't hurry home will be cooked and eaten by nasty goblins.

Such a thing is common in that world.

The weak are meat and the strong devour. No matter how much law and authority humans claim, this is an unavoidable fact.

In this world, anything is at risk of being killed by monsters. Of course, that applies to the monsters as well.

“Fua~... All right”

A small ravine outside the remote town. Having received a request to hunt down a goblin that stole a chicken from a nearby village, Kyle grasps his trembling hand and tries to subdue his shaking body.

Even though goblins are considered small fry monsters, they can multiply rapidly if left alone. Even though the Demonic White Sword had wiped out all the nests near the town, the goblins were beginning to reemerge. Had they come from further afield, or did a Queen survive?

“A goblin nest, huh.”

Though the binoculars, he saw the two goblins he was tracking enter into a large cave opening.

The monster that everyone calls the weakest. For him, they were a terrible root of terror that was implanted by his memories.

He can see it when he closes his eyes. He sees those companions who he befriended on his first adventure tormented and mutilated by Goblins, and the Dragon that burst through the ground to dash all their hopes.

After experiencing that terror, Kyle seriously considered giving up adventuring for good.

At only 15 years old, that encounter with primal cruelty could have made him lose confidence in himself and his skills.

(...But still!)

Even though the fear still remains, it can't last forever.

And he longed for the back of that white haired swordsman who had appeared in his time of need.

Even if you call his reasoning stupid, Kyle is still a man. Besides helping to support the orphanage that raised him, he also joined the guild to feel true freedom and gain a reputation.

If his main reasoning was the former, people would call him wise and mature beyond his years. But since it's the latter, it's natural one would be called a fool.

After he had weighed his options, Kyle chose to continue his life as an adventurer to try and catch up to the woman he admired.

Even if isn't yet as fearless like her. Even if his scrappy battles can't yet compare to that ballet of the sword. It's only the beginning of his journey.

Kyle reconfirms his equipment before he sets off.

“Sword, ready!”

An iron short sword that he sharpened especially for today.

“Shield, fine!”

An ugly yet practical buckler that fit him well.

“Armour, good!”

A cheap metal helmet covering his head and boiled leather armour. Because he lacked funds, he fashioned arm bracers and shin protectors for himself from leather, tied tightly so that they don't fall off in battle.

“All potions, ready!”

Pain relievers, poison antidotes and even a small magical energy recovery potion purchased with the last of his money.

“Even though I don't think I'll be using them, Adventuring gear good!”

Three bottles of water, a coil of rope and a survival knife.

“Alright, let's go!”

He slapped his cheeks with his hand to try and get his spirits up.

When watching Kyle go through this little ritual, an adventurer who doesn't know about his past would probably laugh.

But Kyle doesn't care about that kind of thing. To him this isn't just a simple goblin extermination, it's about him defeating his own personal monsters.

He doesn't intend to die, but no matter what happens in this cave he doesn't plan to leave any regrets. Not again.

“< Radiant • Globe >”

At Kyle’s command, a small sphere of light appears in his hand and illuminates the surrounding cave.

“It might have saved some magical energy to have brought a torch, but I’ve got to keep a hand free...”

As magical energy draws from outside the physical realm, someone who seeks to learn it must come to terms with its power to bend the rules of the world on a psychological level.

When the oldest existence imagined the material from the immaterial, that was when the world was first created.

That is the way people reconcile the physical world with the magical. Over a long period of centuries, processes were developed in order to train people to manipulate knowledge and magical power in order to manipulate phenomena, and sorcery became a weapon of sorts.

“Still <Flash>is such a simple spell, I really have a long way to go. That person didn’t even use magical chants to create those swords, did she?”

Because part of preparing your mind to use magic relies on a verbal suggestion, magic users will typically say their spells aloud when using them. But a true master can simply use the hand motions to cast like the Demonic White Sword did.

“Well, there’s no use pining about something I don’t have.”

Shake those thoughts away, focus on the Goblins. Since the goblins are so sensitive to light from living most of their lives in caves, Kyle lowers the intensity of his light magic to the level of a torch.

“No traps... yet.”

Goblins aren’t monsters to lay traps, but they’re generally the sliest about hiding them.

Leaning from his inexperience on his first adventure, Kyle had asked senior adventurers from the guild plenty of questions about various monsters and asked about goblins especially.

We only barely escaped with our lives when we took a crowd of goblins on, thinking they were no more than children, they said.

They made a sound to distract us to look the wrong way and then surrounded us, one of our party was killed, they said.

When I thought that there were only goblins, a massive ogre appeared, she said.

I got caught in a pincer movement because the goblins had tunnelled behind me, he said.

There are few adventurers who don't know someone who had been cruelly murdered or mutilated by a goblin. And of course, Kyle himself isn't one of them.

A monster with only a child's physique and intelligence. Anyone who simply disregards them as such will inevitably become their prey.

Even though the request noted that the goblins had only recently been sighted and that their numbers were likely few, to take this quest lightly would be a grave insult to his late companions. Kyle makes his way through the cave paying incredible attention to detail, checking along the wall all the while for any secret burrows and scanning the floor to keep an eye out for traps.

“Gyagya”

“Gobu.”

“Che!”

The sound of the goblins chattering almost made him cry out, but he managed to stifle his voice by putting his hand over his mouth.

As he minimizes the light from the torch and listens to the language incomprehensible to human ears, he notes that there are only two speakers.

They'll probably both already be armed.

“...Fuu... Haa...”

Seeing a glimpse his previous despair when he blinked, his fear resurfaces and his

breathing becomes ragged.

Doing his best to get a grip on his chattering teeth and shaking hands, he readies himself behind the backs of the two monsters.

(I'll use Fireball and then... Wait, not yet.)

About to surprise attack from behind using magic, he stopped himself. It's not yet time to use up some of his magic.

Even if this is supposed to just be a goblin's nest, there's no telling what else might be lurking in here. It's best to be cautious and preserve energy.

It's something he had learned the hard way. But, not stopping to dwell on it, Kyle picked up a small rock.

Throwing it lightly, it hit the wall and caused a loud echo to sound through the cavern.

"Gobbut?"

"Ge?"

The goblins walked towards the sound... Where Kyle had hidden in ambush.

He waits patiently whilst listening to the slow steps of the goblins, estimating how many more steps they are away from him.

Kyle touches a knee to the ground and waits for the goblin to round the corner. And at the moment the abominable child-like monster shows its face, he increased the luminosity of his light magic and thrust with the blade.

"G-gah!?"

"Gobuku!?"

The short sword thrust straight through the throat of the first goblin.

"Gagu- gyu... go!!"

The feedback from the sword striking bone jolts through his sword arm.

He had intended to press forward from his first attack and slice off the head of the second goblin, but his blade had sliced up through the throat wrong and clattered into the bottom row of teeth.

Perhaps it's fortunate that the blade was stopped by that bottom row of teeth. If his sword hand had followed the blade through the mouth, he might have received a grievous wound and a fatal infection.

"Of course, I can't just do things like she does, can I?"

Trying to imitate the swordplay of the Demonic White Sword, he had attempted to aim directly for the vital spots with a single thrust, but he was frustrated in his efforts.

It is surprisingly difficult to attack the vital points of opponents in quick succession. No matter what you can achieve when practising, actually utilizing these skills in combat takes a lot of experience.

"As for magic, I'd rather not use it if I can help it... For now, let's just train with the sword. If I practice with it long enough, maybe someday I'll be able to pull off those moves."

Kyle was upbeat, but in reality, he was being naïve.

As he advanced through the cave, he repeated the same trick on any goblins he encountered.

However, the more you use it to cut down enemies the faster you will lose the keen of your blade, especially if you strike bone.

If you looked closely, you would see that the tip of the sword had already been worn down. The sheer amount of blood that had slid down the blade was already beginning to make the grip slippery.

"Gobbu!?"

"Gah!? Oh no!"

And by the time he noticed, it was already too late.

As he tried to ambush his 10th goblin, his sword missed his mark because of the

fatigue in his arm, and when the blade struck the shoulder bone of the goblin the bloodied weapon slipped out of his grip.

The sword clanged on the ground loudly as it fell. The goblin with a deep laceration in his shoulder struck back angrily with a club.

“Uw, uwaaaa!?”

Kyle threw a punch in his panic. Even though it's a far cry from the blade of a sword, the goblin is at just the right height for a punch to be effective.

The two blows cross one another. The club glances off Kyle's wooden bracer, and his fist directs squarely in the goblin's face.

From that point on, it's just a mess. Holding down the goblin by weighing it down with his foot, Kyle pounds it over and over again with his fist.

Kyle was overtaken by the adrenaline and didn't notice the sensation of cracking bone and flayed flesh under his knuckles, so he kept punching for a while after the goblin had already died before he calmed down.

“Haa... Haaa... Whew. One way or another, it worked out...”

Picking up the sword that had slipped from him and examining it with his light, he noticed that a large fracture had developed in the weapon as a result of it hitting the ground at a bad angle.

It was a cheap iron sword he had picked up from the bargain barrel at the smithy. If anything, the fact that it had managed to get through ten goblins before almost breaking was impressive, but he still hadn't reached the innermost part of the cave.

“A new weapon sure would be convenient, though.”

He thought of using the swords and spears of the goblins, but those weapons were all rusty and of awful quality.

It was as he was lamenting this that his eyes settled on the club dropped by the goblin he had just killed.

Taking it in his hand, he gives it a few practice swings. When it comes to delivering a

single fatal blow, a bladed weapon will always win out over something that looked like it was fashioned from a tree.

However, the sense of security that comes with not having to worry about whether your weapon will break on this impact or the next can't be overstated.

“But honestly, this really isn’t like the adventures I imagined.”

The sword is the weapon of the storybook hero, and a club the weapon of a miscellaneous henchman doomed to be cut down. Of course, he wanted to be the former.

But, even if it isn’t ideal, he’s not foolish enough to make a bad choice now.

Tapping his new weapon on his hand, Kyle advances further into the cave.

Chapter 6

The Goblin Queen

Thwack! As the club cracked through a bone, a shaking sensation ran up his arm.

A single blow from the club shatters the jaw of the Goblin.

“Yaaaaaaaaah!!”

“Goggigya!?”

“Gack!?”

The goblin writhes around in pain, still not finished, but Kyle puts his foot on its throat and brains it.

The small monster’s eyes almost leap out of their sockets as it dies. Another goblin rushed at him with a dagger, but it was knocked aside by his buckler shield.

Even if the goblin has a physique of a child, 30 kilos running at you with full force will leave quite an impact. But even if the impact made him stagger slightly, Kyle has an overwhelming advantage because of his weight and his armour.

Kyle stamped on the back of the goblin he had knocked to the floor with his shield and smashed it with the club until it died. Even though the club threatened to fall out if his hand a few times because of the strength of his blows, he gripped onto it with zeal.

“G-gobu...!”

“Ah? Wait!”

The last goblin was petrified at the scene of death in front of him and tried to flee out of the cave.

However, Kyle quickly caught up with it and swung its small body into a wall. He slammed it into the rock so hard that its skull broke on impact, brain, and gore

smearing the wall.

That was the last of the goblins in that part of the cave.

“Nice...! Nice, nice...!”

Realizing he was drunk on the exhilaration of battle, Kyle takes a few deep breaths to settle himself.

It had been two hours since he began the extermination, and although there were a few close shaves, the E-Rank adventurer Kyle had been ultimately successful. Finally feeling the fatigue, he collapses onto the ground.

“Haa... Haa...! All this running around, I’m so tired...!”

Lying spread-eagled on the ground, he stretches his arms which are shaking in exhaustion from having swung the club so many times.

As he takes a break, he quickly drinks out his mobile rations and water, consuming them messily.

These hard on the outside but brittle on the inside rations aren’t particularly tasty, but they’re popular since they’re so cheap and filling.

Thankfully washing down the last of his rations with a swig of water, Kyle murmurs under his breath as he looks at the club.

“Are clubs always this strong?”

Although he used it to ambush and beat a lot of goblins to death, it doesn’t show any signs of wear and tear, which is a big relief to him as a novice adventurer.

Although it can’t slit throats like a sword or dagger would, a blow from a club to any part of the body can do a lot of damage all the same.

“Once I’m done here, maybe I should look into buying a mace? Ah... but I really don’t want to give up the sword.”

Does he aim to look admirable on the battlefield, or aim for pure practicality? As Kyle remained cautious of any new goblin threat, he was bothered by that cumbersome

choice.

Even though it should be obvious which one to pick to increase his odds of survival, when you look at the gallantry of the Demonic White Sword, you can understand why his mind was in conflict with his heart.

“...Even so.”

Kyle put aside his boyish issues for the time being and looked at the corpse of the final defeated goblin.

The goblin he had dashed against the rocks was small, even by goblin standards.

“The further I advance into the cave, the smaller the goblins get, why is that?”

In all the stories he had heard from the senior adventurers, he had never heard of such a thing happening. Even if he had heard of different looking goblins inhabiting the same nest, they had always been described as having roughly the same size.

Maybe some adventurers he hadn’t talked to yet had the answer, but for now, this was all the information he had to go on.

(But, when it’s this small, the only thing you can think of is a child... right? I’ve never heard of children in a goblin nest...)

An unpleasant thought makes his heart twinge.

There is little to no ecological data on many monsters that roam in this world, but goblins are fairly well researched.

The only method of reproductions for Goblins is through an individual referred to as a Queen.

Although all goblins are born from a queen, there are two distinctly different types of goblin societies. There are those goblins who move away from the nest to settle somewhere else, and those goblins who stay where they were born to protect the current Queen and her heir.

The problem was that there are children in this migratory goblin nest when there should only be adults.

“It couldn’t be, there’s a Goblin Queen here?”

Goblin Queen. It is the official name of the extremely rare Queen.

Although goblins typically are only as tall as a child, a Goblin Queen is a different story altogether. Like a spider, the female is twice as large as the male, standing over 2 meters tall.

This nest is only recent so the numbers of goblins here is still relatively small, but one of the most dangerous aspects of goblins is that if left alone for a week they will multiply rapidly

“Then it must be in the depths of the mine... right?”

According to the request, this nest was originally an old coal mine.

Proceeding through the abandoned mining area, he came across an entrance covered with a shawl of cloth, behind which he could hear the cries of an uncountable number of goblins.

Even though the cries sounded like the high pitched cries of a baby, if you listened closely you could hear a low undertone.

(Uwa~ There’s no doubt, it’s really here... Why am I always encountering things where they shouldn’t be...?!)

With the cave in the state it is, it’s almost certain that a Goblin Queen awaits him beyond this curtain. Moreover, considering this is her breeding season, she’s going to be especially ferocious.

(What do I do...! Should I report back to the Guild...? No, I can’t, I personally killed every goblin on the way in here!)

An intelligent monster never forgets a grudge. There’s a well-known story about an adventurer who was eventually hunted down and killed by a monster after he slew its child. Between the time that Kyle reports to the guild and back up arriving, the Queen may see the children that he had killed, and swear vengeance. That could cause immediate problems for the nearby village.

Even though the danger of fighting a Goblin Queen alone should be enough to make

him call for backup, the idea of having to flee a goblin's nest for the second time is too much for Kyle.

At two meters tall and likely armed, a Goblin Queen with nothing to lose and full of murderous rage will be a hard fight.

Especially for an inexperienced rookie adventurer. Considering just how many goblins there are inside the next part of the cave, rushing in without a plan would be suicidal.

"Even so, I still have to do it...!"

Speaking honestly, it was a pretty arrogant remark that overestimated his own strength, but the necessity of his actions considering the possible risk this foe posed was justified.

(Calm down, just think straight and remember the fundamentals...!)

Kyle confirms his plan.

Thanks to his caution so far, all of his tools and armour except for his sword are still in good shape.

It really did pay off to work through the dungeon only using weapons, his magical power is still in top shape. He's also regained some of his physical energy after taking that break.

His rope and survival knife are still here and could be generally useful. His water bottle... Well, that's already served its purpose.

(And as far as my magic goes...)

Currently, Kyle has learned only four types of magic.

<Flash>can create a light source and control its intensity.

A beginner's offensive spell called Fireball that shoots an orb of flame that can ignite enemies.

A simple physical strength spell called Physical Boost.

And <Heal>, which can heal cuts and abrasions instantly and treated as first aid for more severe injuries.

(I can use Flash as many times as I need, but when it comes to Fireball and Heal I can maybe use them four or five times before exhausting my magic, maybe seven times if I use an elixir... As for Physical Boost, I need to save that in case I have to run.)

He glanced at a purple vial of liquid that was in his bag.

Even one bottle is incredibly expensive because of the cost of ingredients, but in some cases, adventurers find they have no choice but to use it.

(Not knowing the exact number of goblins in there is rough... For now, I just have to attempt to fatally wound the Queen using fireball.)

Even if he wants to keep out of physical contact of the goblins, his opponents aren't stupid enough to just let him stand there and fire freely.

So, what can he do? Kyle thinks as hard as he can, and after a bit, he seems to have come up with a plan.

"Fuu... Alright! C-Come and get sooooome!"

He exhaled once to calm himself down, then charged into the final cavern with a rallying cry.

"Gobuu!?"

"Gyagyagyaga!?"

"Gowoooo!?"

All of the goblins turn to look at him as one. With their eyes that can see well even in the deepest darkness, they can clearly see the intruder charging in.

To anyone's eyes, it would look like a reckless move. But, the element of surprise can't be underestimated.

"<Explode>!"

He covered his eyes with his arms and shouted it.

As he said it, the small orb of light that he created using Flash expanded from the flicker of a match to an intense sun that illuminated the entire cave.

“Flash” is an elementary magic that is taught at the very beginning. It’s mainly used to create a small light in caves and other dark places, but its real value is that there’s no limit to the intensity of that light.

“Guooooo!?”

“Gyagyagya!?!?”

The light blinds the goblins before their eyes can adjust to the sudden brightness. Even though goblins have strong eyes, that will only work against them in a situation like this, and they scatter in panic.

“<Ignite • Sphere • Project>!!”

A fireball flew out of his palm after he chanted those three verses, and hit the Goblin Queen square in the chest. The smell of burning skin and hair filled the mining cavern.

“Guaaaaaaaagh!?”

“<Ignite • Sphere • Project>!!”

Another shot is fired, once again hitting the Goblin Queen who was still confused and alight after the first spell.

Rushing the Queen who was suffering the agony of being burned alive and hunched over on the floor, he brought the club down on the crown of her head.

“Alright! Next!”

Not letting his sense of elation get the best of him, he immediately clubs a goblin next to him who was beginning to recover from the blinding light and sent a fireball at one further away.

“<Flash>...! I’m so glad I took that advice to practice in a cave!”

He gulped down the magical potion he had left on his belt and incinerated another four goblins with fireballs.

It takes a lot of effort to keep the foul tasting liquid down, as it was made by mixing several bitter spirit grasses together, but somehow he managed to suppress the nauseating feeling in his stomach.

He needs to take his chance before the goblins fully recover. He needs to eliminate all of them, even the smallest goblin child can be a bud from which a vendetta may bloom.

Seeing monsters as children is foolish, anyway. This is the ironclad conviction that adventurers hold.

“With this... is it over...?”

By the time the smell of burning fat and hair had filled the entire cavern, all that remained were the broken and burned bodies of the fallen goblins.

He still has enough magic power left to use body strengthening once if he needs it. His body is caked with mud and sweat, but for an E-Rank adventurer, this is a brilliant accomplishment.

“...Ah, this is...”

Lacking the energy to raise a victory cry, he noticed something when he looked at the corner of the mining site, something white amongst the brown of the abandoned materials.

A human skull. From the size, it looked like it had belonged to a child. He had learned that goblins and other monsters had typically targeted soft looking women and young children because of them being easier targets.

This skull is certainly all that remains of one of those victims. At the very least, Kyle wants to give it a proper burial, so he makes his way towards it.

“Graaaaaaaaaagh!!”

“Woah!? Uwwaaa!!”

But the moment he does, the cavern is filled with an angry scream.

It was the Goblin Queen. Despite her whole body being racked with burns and one eye melted out of its socket, and despite being smashed over the head with a heavy club, she still clung to life.

She immediately swings at Kyle with a massive woodcutter's ax, and even though Kyle blocks the blow with his club the force behind it forces him back.

"Gyagyagyagya!!"

"Kuh...!? Crap, this is ba-! Shit!"

The club is knocked out of his hands by the strong blows, and they show no sign of letting up.

How can she still possess such speed and power despite being so desperately wounded? She's an engine stoked by the fires of rage for her murdered children, aimed squarely at their killer.

"I-I'll do it! I'll finish you here!"

Kyle glares at the Goblin Queen with his brown eyes, the same colour as the hair on his head.

As he stared into the eyes of that enraged mother, the adrenaline coursing through his veins made him choose fight over flight.

However, his club is still lying on the floor. There's no way he can parry the blow of that axe with his remaining survival knife, even if he used his strengthening magic.

The rookie adventurer desperately dodges and evades the blows of the Goblin Queen, as he paradoxically tries to calm down and think of a way to win whilst also relying on the rush of adrenaline to stay alive.

He doesn't have the ability to use fireball anymore. With the magical energy he has left, the most useful thing he can do right now is to use his strengthening spell. The survival knife is at an overwhelming disadvantage when it comes to reach, and it's unlikely it's even sharp enough to deliver a killing blow.

(There has to be something I can do...! Some other way to win that I haven't thought of yet...!)

He frantically tries to reach for an answer. Then, he hatched on a gamble that would give him one chance to stab the Queen.

Kyle slips his hand into his pouch as he puts distance between himself and the Queen, and grips the weapon.

(I'm alright...! Calm down...!)

The Goblin Queen rushes him with her ax raised. He desperately tries to calm down whilst fighting the feeling of fear crawling through his skin.

Kyle waited until the Queen came close, as she looked to deliver the final fatal blow.

“<Body • Augment>!!”

Pumping all the strengthening magic into his leg, he sweeps the Goblin Queen off her feet, his kick so strong it shatters her leg into an explosion of blood and bone.

But this alone isn't enough, the Queen is so enraged that if he stopped here she would forget the pain and still fight on.

Kyle jumps on the back of the floored Queen, and wraps his length of rope around her neck.

“Uwoaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!!”

“Gy...!? G..... e.....!?”

Kyle roars in effort, and pulls the rope tight with all his power. In desperation to free herself, the Queen drops the axe.

Her sharp nails leave nasty cuts on his face, but she cannot remove the rope held by those now magically strengthened hands, and her complexion gradually becomes more and more purple.

“Go... gya... e... e...”

Eventually, the Goblin Queen's voice fades, her arms go limp, and her eyes roll back in her head. Kyle still continued to crush her windpipe with the rope until he was utterly satisfied that she wasn't getting up again, and then raised a fist into the air.

Back at the guild, the receptionist with the flaxen hair handed him the cloth bag with his reward and gave him a beaming business-like smile.

"Thank you for waiting! Here is your reward!"

The bag weighed down with coins feels light compared to the honour he feels at his victory.

Suppression of the Goblin Queen. Even if the veteran adventures would not consider it a major accomplishment, to the E-Ranked adventurer it was the perfect cap to a great adventure.

He had to deal with many goblins and their Queen, and even if it was a scrappy victory with more than a few lucky moments, the most important thing is that he came back alive.

It was far from ideal, but he is wholly satisfied with the result, and gratefully accepted the reward.

"Encountering a Goblin Queen, that must have been a hard fight, right?"

"Well, yeah. To be honest, I thought I was going to die."

Even though he was successful this time, he realized just how reckless adventuring alone is. He went alone this time because he felt a personal stake in the request, but there were so many times he was in danger that could have been avoided if he had even one companion.

Adding to that, the amount of time and energy he spent simply preparing to do the request solo didn't seem worth it compared to the reward.

"I really think newer adventurers should work in parties in order to keep each other safe. Should I introduce you to some other good adventurers?"

"I appreciate the thought, but I'm still E-Rank. Would anyone even want to take me as a party member?"

"Ah, don't worry about that. The party I was thinking of is led by an A-Rank adventurer, and it's dedicated to training new adventurers."

The stream of rookie adventurers not returning from their first expeditions is like a constant stream.

I shooed away goblins back on the farm. Slimes can be defeated even by a regular person. These conceited beliefs constantly led to an early grave.

There are those who planned to hunt for giant cockroaches or other insects but were killed by roaming monsters when they couldn't react to the ambush.

Even if they feel love to call themselves adventurers, most rookies are complete amateurs in the field.

In order to increase the survivability rates of these young adventurers, the guild began instituting training programs and gave certain veteran adventurers roles as instructors. The party recommended by the receptionist is lead by one such instructor and is filled with new adventurers.

"How about it? Of course, the reward will be somewhat reduced because of it being split amongst a party, but the danger will also be decreased."

"Mmm, I suppose that's true."

It's an attractive idea. But Kyle has contracted something known as "Adventure Pace".

Once again caught behind pride and practicality, Kyle hemmed and hawed as the receptionist concealed a laugh behind the papers in her hand.

"Well, as insurance, the guild has attached another veteran to the party. Isn't it someone Kyle knows well?"

"Eh?"

As soon as Kyle heard the name that the receptionist said with a mischievous grin, he immediately made up his mind to join.

Chapter 7

Party Request

“Tio, please sit up straight and don’t fall asleep.”

“Fuwaaaa~n”

It’s around the time in the morning that her daughters and the other children around their age are going to school. Shirley had sat Tio in front of the mirror and was gently combing her hair.

Tio has a terrible habit of falling asleep that Sophie and Shirley have never suffered from. Waking up is especially hard for her.

Sophie, who loves playing the elder sister, usually takes care of keeping Tio awake and organized in the morning. But these days she seems to be getting up earlier and leaving whilst Tio is still asleep.

Habit is a terribly insidious thing, so Shirley who was used to Sophie handling these things in the morning got a terrible shock when Tio appeared in the dining room in her pyjamas and shocking bed head, having forgotten to get changed. She quickly took her back to the room to try and wrestle it with a comb and send her to school.

“Really now, showing up in the dining room like that. I feel like I’m saying this constantly, but you’re a ten-year-old girl now, you’ve got to care about your appearances.”

“Mm. But, it doesn’t really bother me.”

“That’s not the issue here... Haa...”

Tio manages to wake up fully after being dangerously close to nodding off again and hurries to change her clothes and wash her face. Shirley sighed as she watched her.

A girl really should take better care of herself. Even if she’s been an adventurer for the past ten years, she was a noblewoman for nearly twice as long.

Even though they wear their hair simply and dress modestly, no one could ever call the family unsightly.

It's no exaggeration to state that Shirley and her daughters possess incredible beauty, and the simple way they adorn themselves only serves to enhance their mystique.

Even though she's an adventurer now, a profession always associated with rough characters and crude looks, Shirley's pride as a woman and as a mother dictates that her daughters always look the best they can.

(Being like Sophie is one thing, but she's almost like a man in how little she cares about this kind of thing.)

The only saving grace is that she's fond of taking baths. Apart from that, if she wasn't being watched by Shirley or Sophie, Tio would simply wear pyjamas all day without changing or combing her hair and sleep wherever and whenever she feels like it, without caring how defenseless she is.

She reminds her of a stray alley cat, it's very hard to control that beloved daughter of hers.

(Well, maybe this is a good thing?)

However, this is Shirley, recognized by all as a stupidly doting mother. She actually enjoys being able to fuss over Tio constantly.

Even though she's glad Sophie is becoming mature and independent beyond her years, it still makes her feel a little lonely, so having to keep an eye on Tio at all times is a secret joy.

Rushing about doing trivial things for her daughter is that woman's greatest joy in life.

But there's a problem. No matter how much Shirley wishes it won't ever happen, eventually Tio will grow up and become an independent adult herself.

Even though the very idea vexes her, one day she might have to confront the image of a man walking beside Tio.

She would regret it forever if the man of her dreams was turned off by her slovenly behaviour.

However, just saying things isn't enough to be a parent. Shirley's educational policy states that even if the girls are still young, they should make caring about their personal appearance a daily habit.

...Though in this case, the results remain to be seen.

"Anyways, mum, is it true you're not home today and tomorrow?"

"Yes. I asked Martha to take care of meals."

"Hrmm... That's longer than usual..."

Some adventurers spend almost a week out in the field after accepting a request.

Shirley is the type of adventurer who only accepts quest no more than a day's travel outside of town, no matter the difficulty or reward because she wants to spend as much time with her daughters as possible.

Another reason she prefers to fight near town is so that she can exterminate the monsters seeking to disturb the place her daughters live, though unlike the rumours she does sometimes venture further afield.

If there are no requests nearby, she will leave her children in Martha's care for the day and attack monsters that appear on the roads leading towards town, especially those monsters that are hampering the supply of food for meals she wants to cook.

Regardless of the former, the latter is a matter of life and death for over adventurers. Although monsters are certainly attracted by the large amounts of food, ranches and farms very often have resident adventurers attached to them, so it's rare for Shirley to have to go that far out.

"You're right. It's been about two months since I last asked Martha to take care of you, hasn't it?"

"Is it a request from a farm again?"

"No, this time it's for... Ah, you've got to hurry or you're going to be late."

"?"

Tio tilts her head at her mother who cut the story short. However, Shirley didn't dare go on.

The only reason she's taking this request is so that she can gather materials for her daughters' 15-year-old coming of age gifts.

On that day that will mark a turning point in their lives, she wanted their gifts to be a complete surprise.

"Come on now, you need to have breakfast and go or you're not going to make it on time."

"Muu... If only I didn't have to change clothes. We do it every day but it's just so annoying..."

"I can't have that. One day, you'll have to do this every day on your own, you know?"

"Really?"

"Yes, really."

As she tried to convince the reluctant Tio, she stroked the girl's hair. And that smile on her face that couldn't be seen by anyone was filled with the warmest love.

After seeing Tio to school safely, Shirley stopped by the blacksmith before going to the guild.

"You want to order a pickaxe?"

"What are you trying to say?"

Shirley wrinkled her brow in indignation at the person who runs the forge in this frontier city, a Dwarf named Dimros whose beard hides his whole chest.

"We sell weapons and armour here, not tools. If you want a pickaxe, get it somewhere else."

"Haven't you made excellent pickaxes before? All the pickaxes that you can loan from

the Guild were made by you, were they not?"

Even if they appear to be cold-hearted and blunt, dwarves are a race with a strong sense of duty and empathy. If an adventurer is in need, they will often take requests at their shop, even if it's something they don't typically make.

"If you need it for a mining request, you're an adventurer yourself right? Just go and borrow the one already there."

"It isn't a mining request, it's a monster-slaying quest. I could probably borrow it if I begged, but I really don't want to have to talk explain my reasons to anybody."

In any case, in order to get the materials she needed, a pickaxe was a necessity. And since she only wants the best, it makes sense that she'd want not just any mass-produced cheap thing, but a pickaxe made by a master blacksmith.

"...Bah. Wait there for a moment."

After Dimros had withdrawn into the back of his shop, Shirley looked around at the weapons and armour that lined the walls.

All of the steel had been polished to a pristine finish, and the few adventurers in the store had weapons in hand, testing the swing and the balance.

"Oi, look at that beauty"

"Why on earth is she at a blacksmith?"

"The Sword Demon... Is she a regular here?"

As Shirley walked towards a sword that caught her eye, she completely ignored the rookie adventurer who stared at her in admiration, the adventurer who had just blown into town who stared at her quizzically and the veteran adventurer who stared at her with an unpleasant expression.

"Hm."

This shop has a fairly wide amount of space between the different displays. It's suitable to give prospective buyers a chance to test their weapons in hand.

Even if it isn't enchanted with any magic, she can see that this sword is a masterpiece of dwarven craftsmanship as she swings it.

If an amateur saw her, they'd think it was just a slender woman playing with a sword. Indeed, that's what the rookie adventurer is thinking even now.

However, as she makes those swings that would be finishing blows look effortless, any experienced swordsman would have the image of that sword slicing through steel in her hands.

"Hmm? Is this... a new work of his?"

As Shirley repeated her drill of making a swing and then returning to the original position, she wondered about the double-handed sword that had curves in the blade like a rippling wave.

She liked the feeling of swinging it. But beyond that, when Shirley tries to think of the actual purpose behind this blade's look, she has no idea.

"What drew you to this one?"

Dimros looked at the sword in her hands as he returned, carrying a pickaxe in his own.

"Don't ask for a discount, by the way. The tax collectors have been all over me recently."

"Yeah, you're not the only one. By the way, Dimros, what kind of sword is that? I haven't seen that shape before."

"It's a new design I'm trialling, I borrowed the idea from the tribesmen of that country southwest of here. Wounds made by this sword should be incredibly hard to heal with healing magic... or at least they should be."

"Should be?"

"Ah. No one has actually bought it because they don't trust the design. All the blades I made with curved edges didn't sell in the past either, what is it with humans adventurers and being so unadventurous?"

Belonging to a race almost as long-lived as elves, Dimros has probably seen a large variety of warriors over the years. Having his new weapons dismissed as novelties,

Shirley can understand how he feels.

But even so, he still carries on making innovative designs. Shirley can't bring herself to dislike this obstinate blacksmith.

"Alright. I'll buy this one as well. I'll test whether or not it really hinders healing magic for you."

"Oi oi, that was a quick decision wasn't it? You know this will handle completely differently to a regular sword, right?"

"Don't worry. I'll practice with it. That being said, what do you call this kind of sword?"

"Over there, they call it a Flamberge. In the language of this land, it means Flame Blade"

As soon as she heard that, she concluded her business. She left the shop with the pickaxe... and the flamberge.

"Man, I sure do get some eye-catching and troublesome customers sometimes. I wonder if selling such a sword to that gentle looking woman was a good idea?"

"But as a merchant, so long as they pay you don't have any complaints, right?"

"You idiot! As a craftsman, I want to see my weapons in the hands of skilled warriors!"

What a romantic this dwarf is! Whilst ignoring the slight grudge building up behind her, Shirley leaves the shop.

Neither shadow nor shape of that sword or pickaxe exists in those hands that had been holding them just seconds ago.

Crossing the hall of the Adventurers Guild to the request board, she looked at the paper that had been stamped with a large red word, "emergency".

Just as Shirley planned, no one had taken the quest to exterminate the Dragon that dwelled in Jewelsaad mine.

As Shirley took the request up to the counter, she met Yumina who broke into a big smile on seeing her, and then shock when she saw the request she was holding.

“Shirley, you’re going to accept the request?”

“Yes. I also have my own circumstances.”

“Oh, thank goodness. The A-Rank adventurers are all tied down with this emergency request or that, the guild had to postpone sending us a party.”

She had the face of a lucky someone who had found a gold coin on the side of the road.

There are very few A-Rank adventurers in the world. Compared to their number, the volume of emergency requests are high, and currently, those high ranked adventurers are busy running from one to the next.

It was for that reason Shirley didn’t want to be promoted.

“By the way Shirley, if possible, I’d like you to take on this request with a party.”

“Ha?”

“Hie!?”

Shirley couldn’t help but make a frightening retort. If one strained their ears, they could have heard a snapping sound on the desk that wasn’t being touched, but they pretended it was their imagination.

Even though Yumina is trembling under her glare, she rallies herself with an internal “I can’t afford to lose here!” and stares back at those sharp eyes.

“What do you mean by this? No way, are you trying to remove obstacles for my promotion?”

“N-no! It’s for... Yes, it’s for that reason! There are some circumstances involved, but basically, this adventurer party coincidentally is here to do the same request as you, so why not do it together...?”

Yumina tried to explain whilst making all manner of hand gestures. Although she might have fudged her lines a bit, she conveyed her meaning well enough for Shirley

to calm down.

"It's being lead by an A-Rank adventurer, but it's a party intended to train rookies that were assembled by guild request. Although they were sent here to help deal with the dragon problem, it's a suicidal act to fight it virtually alone, since there's no way E-Rank adventurers could fight a dragon."

Even if it's an emergency, it's hard for one person to take charge of a full party by themselves, and some people might inevitably get hurt. When an A-Rank instructor forms a party full of low ranking members, it is usually customary to have a B-Rank also in the party to help share the leadership responsibilities.

"I get it now. I just happened to be the convenient adventurer, right?"

Either a lot of coincidences have piled up by chance, or someone is pulling the strings, but regardless Shirley winces at having one of her walls to promotion being pulled away at.

To be honest, Shirley was quite confident that she could defeat the dragon on her own. She doesn't intend to look down on opponents, but she's basing this judgement off her past experiences.

Therefore, she could finish this request solo as well. Rather, E-Rank adventurers would only be a hindrance. As she was about to reject the proposal, Yumina told her something that made her bite her tongue.

"By the way, the Guild Master personally requested that you help to raise up the next generation of adventurers, I recall that the word used was 'Please'."

"Ugh."

"I heard that Shirley owes a great deal to the Guild Master, is that right?"

"Uuugh."

It happened about a decade ago. At the time, whilst seeking out the adventurers guild with nothing but the clothes on her back and two babies in her arms and wandering the kingdom without even a map, the Guild Master looked after her, and recommended that they move to this frontier town, even letting her stay free of charge at Deficit House.

Shirley has always talked about how returning favours is the key to a relationship built on trust to her daughters. If Shirley herself doesn't follow this teaching, how can she ever hope that her children will?

Besides, using the word 'please' is just unfair. If she refused, it would be like Shirley had returned to the conscienceless monster she had been before Sophie and Tio.

(...That witch. You could have come directly and just asked me yourself.)

If she refused... More than likely that woman would start crying crocodile tears and talking about how she helped them all those years ago. That's the kind of woman she was.

Shirley exhaled a sigh and raised her hands as if surrendering.

"I get it. So, are the others fine with working with me?"

"Yes, absolutely! It was really reassuring to see how enthusiastic everyone was! Now then, let's go meet them!"

Chapter 8

The Rookie Training Party

Yumina led Shirley to the guild's parlour but stopped as she held the doorknob.

“LIKE I WAS SAYING! This is a good opportunity for us as adventurers!”

“And I’m telling you, you’re wrong! A great opportunity? To get us all killed, maybe!”

From inside the room, they could hear the shouting of two younger adventurers, a boy and a girl. As Shirley shot her a questioning look, Yumina just sighed whilst massaging her forehead.

“Those two... They can’t stop quarrelling even at a time like this...?”

“What is this all about?”

“Ah, this is the rookie adventurer party I was talking about. Unfortunately, these two seem to be old rivals or something like that, they’re always bickering.”

Arguments between new adventurers aren’t uncommon. But Yumina seems to be grumbling even more than usual, is it possible that these two are on such bad terms that they’re constantly almost coming to blows?

“Both of you, that’s enough.”

“Ack!?”

“Gah!?”

The noisy argument is cut cleanly by a calm voice, followed by the sound of two hard thwacks.

“Sounds like it’s over.”

“Yes. We should probably go in before they start up again.”

As she enters the room with Yumina, Shirley glanced at the adventurers sitting there.



Two young adventurers, a boy and a girl, are squatting in the middle of the room holding their heads. The girl had slightly pointed ears.

Standing above them holding out both their fists was a person she recalled seeing at some point... and adventurer with the head of an ox and a massive war axe on his back, a Minotaur beast man.

“Ah...!”

And the last person. A brown haired teenage boy who looked familiar. That’s right, the magical knight that she had saved when his party had met with misfortune in the goblin nest.

It looks like he continued with his adventures even after all that. When he saw Shirley, he broke into a smile.

“Alright, settle down! Jeez, if new adventurers got scared away by your racket making it would cause me no end of trouble.”

“W-we’re sorry.”

“‘We’re sorry’ he says... just whose fault do you think this is?”

“Ha!? It was you who-!”

“You two really want to start up again?”

Just as they were about to get up in each others’ faces again, the minotaur fellow’s raised fist and Yumina’s cold smile made them quickly sit back down.

“Now that you’re finally quiet, we can do some introductions. Now, Shirley, if you please.”

Shirley and Yumina take one sofa, whilst the others take the sofa opposite.

Although the minotaur man declined to take a seat and gave off an air of apathy, Yumina nonetheless prompted Shirley to introduce herself with a cheery voice to try and lighten the mood.

“My name is Shirley. My role is a front line swordsman.”

However, betraying Yumina's expectations, there's only an awkward silence after Shirley's all too brief introduction.

"Um... is that all?"

"What else do they need to know?"

Silence loomed again. As Yumina desperately thought of some way to break the ice, the minotaur beast man stepped forward.

"I'm Asterios, the leader of this party. I'm an adventurer who originally started in this town like Shirley did, but this is our first time speaking."

"That's true. I've seen you around, but I've never been introduced nor talked to you. Are you a warrior monk, by any chance?"

"That's exactly right."

She had thought that he had a relatively gentle nature considering his race, but it made sense once she saw his attire.

Although the weapon he wields is the traditional battle axe of the minotaur race, he wore a gown and a bell inscribed with the emblem of the Ethereal Mother hung on his neck next to his identification tag.

The holy teachings of the sky mother don't discriminate between the races. It makes sense that he would be selected as a teacher, considering how the church itself teaches.

The church values having a calm mind and manner above all else, you won't find any priests or monks who preach rhetoric like a firebrand. For the armed monks of the church, they must be warriors who are as pure of heart as they are brave.

"And these are the adventures I'm currently leading as an instructor."

"Then, it's my turn!"

The breathtakingly beautiful girl was fairly short, sporting a small breastplate covering her torso and maroon coloured hair.

Her pointed ears marked her as a demi-human, and those golden eyes gleamed with

curiosity. She must be a hobbit.

Since she has to be 15 years old to enrol in the guild, her height means that there's no way she's an elf, despite those ears. Also, that baby face of hers, if you weren't the scrutinizing type you might think she was younger than Shirley's daughters.

"My name is Leia! I'm a magical archer!... And just for the record, I'm a half-elf, so don't mistake me for a hobbit."

"..."

She swallowed her surprise as it crept up her throat. You really do have to admire Shirley's ability to adapt quickly to situations.

Half-elves are half human and half elvish mixed-race children. They live three times as long as the average human, but of course, that's a blink of an eye compared to pure-blooded elves.

But regardless, half-elves and regular elves both have virtually identical ageing to humans until around twenty years old, why is it that this girl looks so underdeveloped?

"I'm next? My name is Cudd. I'm a scout."

Black hair and black eyes, a rarity in this country. He's of medium build in both height and weight and is garbed in light clothing to help him move around easier. The only gear she could see on him was a tool bag and a large knife on his waist.

He seems like the complete opposite to Leia. Whilst she seems to have an air of haughtiness about her, this boy has an aura of constantly being on guard.

"Um, we've met once before, but I failed to introduce myself that time. I'm Kyle, a magic knight who just recently joined the party. I wanted to thank you again for saving me the other day."

"Eh? Huh? You two know each other?"

"Well, sort of."

After hearing the name of that boy, Shirley looks at the tags of the adventurers in the

room.

Asterios has a silver tag, signifying his A-Rank status. The rest of the party are bronze. Shirley had her doubts.

"I don't mind going as a party, but isn't it too early for E-Rank adventurers to fight a dragon? When the fighting starts, it may be hard to protect them, you know?"

There is no restriction on who can receive a request, be they E-Rank or S-Rank. If one isn't confident enough in their abilities to progress they can choose a request around or below their rank, and if one is ready to brave death in order to prove themselves they can pick a higher ranked request.

The adventurers guild isn't some kind of, especially close-knit organization. When adventurers register, it's made clear to them that any injury or death that occurs when taking requests is their own responsibility, and there's no such thing as worker compensation.

"Actually, when it comes to facing the dragon what good will the E-Ranks be? Only Asterios would be able to do anything. To be honest, this doesn't seem like very effective training at all."

The young adventurers wither under her merciless assessment. They're already aware of the reality without being told.

Anyone who would have no doubts about fighting such a formidable foe at their level would be a fool. Even if there is a high ranking adventurer attached, sending E-Ranks against a dragon just seems like a suicide mission.

"She's not wrong. But, I think there has been a slight misunderstanding."

Shirley looks towards Yumina. As if she only just realized her mistake, she put her hands together in apology.

"Ah, s-sorry! I guess I didn't explain this well enough."

"Don't worry, I was going to ask you for more details anyway... By the way, this request was originally posted because of unexpected encounters with dragons when fighting lower level monsters, right?"

"Yes. As you may have guessed, before Kyle joined us, we had gone to Jewelsaad Mine before in order to exterminate the bad bonobos that were inhabiting it, but..."

Bad bonobos are monkey-like monsters that mostly live in mountainous regions.

They are intelligent monsters, to the point where some of them can even use magic. They have long, thin limbs and prefer to attack from range with stones and magic instead of fighting up close. They're typically easy for E-Rank adventurers to deal with, but there have been reported incidents where bonobos have grouped up with goblins, and that can be troublesome.

"The bonobos were living in the company of a dragon, right? It's a story you hear a lot lately."

"Correct. Of course, with only two E-Rank adventurers as my backup it was an impossible situation, so we immediately returned to the guild. But there was a problem."

"When we were trying to escape, I lost the jewel in my necklace."

Leia took over from Asterios and indicated the necklace she wore that had an empty round indent in its centre.

"It's my coming of age gift, something handed down in my family for generations. It was made by an ancient master craftsman who used large diamonds. The gemstone fell out when I dropped it... Since those bonobos picked it up, it's probably in that dragon's nest now, huh?"

Leia had been jovial until now, but her face had turned serious. If you lose such a cherished family heirloom, it would be no surprise if an expression as bright as the sun would darken.

"I understand now, so the reason for going to the mine is not just for rookie training. You intend to go to the dragon's nest and retrieve the diamond... is that it?"

The things dragons covet the most are gold, silver and diamonds. As an A-Rank adventurer called for a withdrawal, it seems like the dragon is definitely not a young one either.

Even though she doesn't know if there are any other diamonds in the nest, there's no

way Shirley would be able to distinguish it from the others if there were.

"Well, if that's the case, wouldn't it be better if you just retrieve the stone after I'm done killing the dragon... Wait, that won't work. I should ask, do you have the funds to buy it back at market price?"

"Yes."

Because the number of binding agreements between the guild and the government are few, the adventurers who slay a dragon are free to carry sell as much of its loot as they like regardless of who it belonged to. As for what they leave, it is confiscated by the knights and soldiers of the Kingdom who bring it back to the royal treasury.

It's because of this that any adventurer who manages to slay a dragon can earn huge amounts of wealth, though it's also a rule that anyone who didn't contribute to the request is not permitted to enter the nest.

If you enter the nest without being a part of the successful party and steal gems and valuables like a hyena, you will be found out as a liar by the priest's magic have both the treasure confiscated and your honour as an adventurer ruined.

If Shirley had to make an allegory, it would be like this. The tacit understanding between adventurers is similar to the codes of chivalry that knights adhere to, taking the reward from a request you had no part in was an unthinkable breach of conduct and their reputation amongst other adventurers would never recover.

"But, I had a thought. A group of bonobos that live under a dragon, the request to exterminate them is still active. What if we defeat the bonobos whilst you focus on fighting the dragon?"

Asterios placed the request on the desk, and on it, in thick red lettering there were written the words 'Dragon Outbreak'.

"So essentially, you can prove that your party contributed to the dragon suppression by killing the bonobos that are subservient to it, and we can have this be a double request... is that it?"

"Of course, this way it's not a lie that this is a training quest as well, right? What's more, even if they can't participate in the battle, they could learn a lot just by watching you from afar. And if you're worried about the rookies' safety, don't be."

His huge chest moves and the bell around his neck rings out a clear tone.

"Magical barriers are my strong suit. No matter how strong the opponent is, the barrier should be able to give them a chance to escape."

"The guild master herself had no problems with Asterios' proposal. Even so, there's no doubt that this is going to be a dangerous task, if the newcomers aren't up for it then..."

When Yumina turned to look at Kyle and Cudd, the former nodded assertively and the latter scratched his head as if he didn't really have any choice but to agree.

"It may be dangerous, but I still want to go. I know we just met, but we're still a party."

"I agree. Besides, it might not be so bad having this little kid be indebted to me."

"Who's a little kid, you fresh punk!?"

"Yeowch!?"

Leia kicks Cudd hard in the shin, forcing him to hop on the spot whilst clutching it. It seems she doesn't like being teased about her height.

"What are you doing, you shitty little brat!"

"You said it again!? No one get in my way! I'm going to make this one cry his eyes out!"

"W-wait, you two, stop fighti- uwagh!?"

Kyle tried to break the two up, but he got an elbow in the face for his efforts. As the magical knight lay sprawled on the floor and the two began to wrestle, the other three people in the room observed the pathetic scene.

"...Is it always like this?"

"Mm. It makes me embarrassed as an instructor to say it, but apparently, these two have been fighting like this since they were children, and will start fights over the most trivial things constantly."

"Before I came in they were fighting... What kicked that off?"

“They were arguing about whether or not to take on the dragon.”

“Well, they should be free to choose, but...”

Even if they hadn’t been talking for half an hour, Shirley felt like she had a good grasp on the personalities of those two.

The cautious boy with the venomous tongue and the curious girl who was perhaps a little too reckless. And with very easy to anger personalities, it’s like the perfect storm for petty squabbles and fights between them.

“But even though they’re like this, they never seem to step on each other’s feet during battles.”

“I see. So you’re saying their constant fighting is proof of how close they really are?”

“”We’re not close!””

In perfect synch, they shouted loud enough to echo through the guild.

Chapter 9

Dragon Wagon

The Jewelsaad Mine is located three days journey away from the frontier town, or six days for a round trip. If you include the time it might take to complete the request, they may be in the field for an entire week. So, the rookie adventurers are preparing their personal food supplies.

Or, at least, that's what Kyle and the other E-Rank adventurers were expecting.

"I plan on being back the day after tomorrow, so let's get ready quickly."

Their well thought out notions were shattered by Shirley's words.

"No no no no, what are you talking about!? You do know how far the Jewelsaad Mine is from here, don't you? It's unreasonable to think you can make a round trip in three days!"

"Yes, but no matter what happens I have to be back the day after tomorrow."

As she stared him down with those piercing eyes, Cudd drew back. Keen pupils, and a glare as sharp as a blade.

"But, how do you plan on getting back so soon? It takes at least three days to just reach the mine, doesn't it?"

"That's not a problem. I will get our form of transport ready, so please come to the town gates once you've finished buying whatever food and gear you need. I'll pay you for my share of the good later."

"Form of transport?"

Without saying anything, Shirley goes back into the guild. As the youngsters looked confused, Asterios simply nodded sagely.

"I see."

"Do you know what she meant, Mr Asterios?"

"Yeah. I don't know exactly what would make her go to those lengths... But, for now, let's just complete our preparations."

Whilst still confused about just what the two veterans meant, they did as they were told for now.

After parting with Shirley, the group began to prepare all the supplies they needed for the request. Food wise they stuck to meals they stuck to dry goods, some simple spices and water skins. Other than that they also prepared cooking utensils, blankets, tools to keep their weapons and armour keen and even medical supplies. As they did, Cudd whispered so that Asterios wouldn't hear.

"You know, I only just joined this party as Asterios took charge... He definitely looks the part, but is that woman really strong at all?"

"Even if I can't stand the fact that I'm agreeing with you, you're right. When I heard we were teaming up with the Demonic White Sword, I was expecting some tough old man, not a woman who looks like she's just out for a stroll."

Since Kyle saw Shirley's prowess first hand he can hardly agree with what they're saying, but he keeps his mouth shut and focuses on the preparations.

After talking to some of the other adventurers, he found out that despite Shirley's strength she isn't very well regarded by the other adventurers, and is often the subject of some pretty bad rumours.

Even if it's not a pleasant thing to think about, he can't help but wonder if the reason she works as a solo adventurer is that she's a misanthrope, or if she prefers working alone.

"Is something wrong, Kyle? You seem lost in thought."

Asterios turned around and questioned Kyle as if he had seen into his mind.

"Um, well, I was just wondering why Shirley had never joined a party up until now. If someone is that strong, surely you'd want to have her help?"

"Hmm. Of course, only she knows the whole truth, but... Well, on the day she joined

the Guild, she caused a bit of an uproar."

He thought of that day ten years ago.

The first day she arrived in town, she did so with her two babies. When she said that she wanted to register, the Guild had exploded in mocking laughter.

Even though the Guild doesn't discriminate on the basis of gender for its recruits, nine out of ten adventurers are still men, so the poor looking girl who wanted to sign up was mercilessly jeered.

Even more so because she was holding her two babes.

"This is no place for a girl like you!"

"Go home and give those babies some milk!"

"Hey, why not 'party' with us tonight!?"

Even though Asterios and some of the other adventurers had tried to quiet them down, Shirley had already unsheathed the two-handed blade she wore on her belt and told the crowd as she glared.

"If you have complaints, then I'll hear them at the end of my sword. After I win, you can keep them to yourselves from now on."

Many of those complaining adventurers drew their swords and were soundly defeated, and many others simply clammed up under the pressure of those eyes.

"Even if she saved herself from being humiliated, she was alienated from most of the adventurers after that. She never really tried to patch things up, and now everyone simply regards her as a solo adventurer, with all the prejudice that comes along with it."

"Such a thing... How did it end up like that?"

"That's the kind of thing only she can tell you. In any case, we've finished up here, we should go and meet with Shirley."

After completing their preparations, Kyle and the rest of the party carried their

luggage to the gate where Shirley was waiting.

There they saw not only Shirley but a dragon that had its two hind legs attached to the wheels of a wagon with no cover.

“Uwaa!? W-what is a monster doing here!?”

“Don’t panic. This is a war wagon pulled by Rangitz, a dragon that has been tamed by the Guild.”

Dragons are ranked by race, and in rare cases by individual strength.

They are divided into seven distinct tiers from strongest to weakest: Dragon God, Dragon King, Ancient Dragon, Martial Dragon, War Dragon, Warrior Dragon and Low Dragon. Only the Low Dragons are able to be tamed by humans.

Such a dragon can become the vehicle for a war wagon, and the idea is already spreading to the military where battlefield applications are being tested.

The low dragon that Shirley holds the reigns of, the lowest dragon in their species hierarchy, was rented from the Guild for a fee.

“I have experience when it comes to handling, do you mind leaving me in charge of the driving?”

“No, I don’t mind, but I didn’t know that you knew how to handle a dragon chariot?”

“The war wagon is originally a Minotaur invention. When the guild started using it five years ago, weren’t you the one who taught us how to drive it?”

“Well well... I think I remember something like that.”

Although she didn’t know his name five years ago, she does distinctly remember someone of his race being involved in the training back then.

“Now, please put your luggage inside and tie it down with the rope. If it falls out it will be a problem.”

“I’ll go with your suggestion since you’re the senior here, but why not just have a wagon with a roof? That would save us the work.”

"If this guy pulled a wagon like that, it would break. That's why we need a specially made one."

"Eh?"

Leaving Leia puzzling over just what she meant, Shirley finishes the preparations.

"Um... War wagons and dragons, this is all expensive, isn't it? I don't really have any money at all."

"Don't worry, since I'm the one who wants to hurry, I'll pay for the rental fee. Oh, and these as well."

Shirley took out four green and four blue vials, for a total of eight. She distributed the two types evenly amongst the party.

"The green potion will prevent motion sickness, I suggest you take it before getting on."

"M-motion sickness?"

"The blue potion is for sobering up. Please take it when we arrive to avoid any complications."

"Sobering up!?"

"Also, when you get on, make sure to securely fasten yourself in place with a rope."

"With a rope!?"

The two veterans ignore their shocked responses and simply continue with the safety explanation. If safety was the goal, it certainly didn't seem like it to the rookies, who were beginning to fear for their lives.

"Then with that out of the way, let's get going. In case of an emergency, you need to be ready to cut the rope with a knife to escape."

"Why did you have to make this sound like something we won't make it out of alive!?"

At the insistence of the two high ranking adventurers, the rest of the party reluctantly

agreed to get aboard.

The three of them thought they understood what the veterans were talking about. But they didn't truly understand the reality of what it means to ride a war wagon pulled by a dragon.

"I will signal when I want you to change direction. Now, go at full speed!"

As if it understood Shirley's words, the dragon let off a roar and dug its talons into the earth.

As it took off, the war chariot accelerated on every rotation of its wheels and eventually as it spat up dust in its wake the scenery began to pass by in a blur.

""WOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOAH!?!?!?!"

In response to the speed that would easily outstrip even the fastest stallion, Kyle and the other two can't help but let out a scream.

As the wagon seemed to fly without warning whenever it hit a bump in the road, sending the young adventurers ricocheting around in their seats, the three of them could barely catch their breath.

"Hmm... It's been a long time since I rode a dragon this way, but this really is some good leg strength."

"WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOOD ABOUT THIIIIiiiiiiiSSS?!?!?"

There are various types of rideable tamed dragons.

A dragon that one rides directly on their back through the air. A water dragon that can swim freely in oceans and rivers. There are all sorts of low dragons that one can ride, ranging from the air to the ground.

However, it would be foolish to think that just because they've been tamed by humans that these dragons are weak in any way.

One of the falsely held beliefs about low dragons is that they're cowardly monsters who let themselves be ruled over by humans, but any low dragon is far stronger than an ordinary monster, and that can be seen in the dragon currently pulling the wagon.

A thick and hard neck, with a frill that reaches from the back of its head to the base of its neck. Coupled with a horn that can smash boulders, this dragon is a monster that would cruelly destroy any lesser monster that got in its way with its speed, endurance and power.

Even though the dragon was well tempered and perfectly suited to taking adventurers long distances in a relatively short travel time, it was only loaned out to parties on urgent requests, such as killing a high ranking dragon.

“Turn to the right.”

The front and the back of the wagon were the worst places to be when the dragon turned. It lost none of its momentum as it turned and kept running to the right, paying no heed to the wheels almost flying off their axis.

“Kyaaaaaaaaaaaaa!!! I’m falling!! I’m falling!!!!”

“Hmm!!”

Asterios jammed his legs into the other side of the wagon to keep himself steady when it felt like the wagon was about to capsize around him.

Even though Minotaurs are famed for their strength and raw power, his leg is shaking as the wagon turns.

“Ha ha ha! Not bad! You’re not half bad at all, Miss Shirley!”

“I don’t drive these that often, so I can’t claim to be any good at it. If I’m going to be honest, I prefer the one seater dragons.”

“I-is this really the time for you two to be happily chattyaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?”

“Yeowch! I-I can’t stop bouncing around!!”

Kyle and Cudd continued to scream. Leia, on the other hand...

“Ahahahaha! What is this!? This is so much fun!!”

She had already gotten used to it and was beginning to enjoy the explosive speed of the dragon. Although she may be small, she definitely has the most guts of the three.

"Hey, hey! Can't we make it go even faster!?"

"Don't mess around!! If you go any faster than this there's no way we'll survivyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah!?"

"Please stop stop stop stop stop stooooooooooooah!!"

Kyle and Cudd scream some more. Meanwhile, Leia and Asterios continue to enjoy the ride in the runaway wagon. Shirley, who wasn't paying attention to what was going on behind her, had her thoughts elsewhere.

(The deadline is the day after tomorrow... If I don't make it back by then....!)

The Demonic White Sword is completely fixated on finishing this request as quickly as possible. Her heart was racing, and an uncharacteristic fear was clutching at her.

(I can't be without Sophie and Tio for over three days... I could die from daughter deficiency!)

Once in the past, she had taken a request that kept her away from town for a time. After two days without seeing her beloved daughters, she began to be attacked by fierce withdrawal symptoms.

The only thing she could think of two days in is whether or not her daughters were safe without her, and the trembling in her limbs didn't stop.

That's the true reason she hates adventuring more than a day away from town. She had intended to only take two days on a round trip by crossing the dense forests in their path on a single rider dragon, but since she's now accompanied by the rookie party riding in the wagon, they're forced to take a longer route.

(Even so, just knowing I won't be able to see them today is making my chest tighten, I don't even want to think about what would happen after four or five days. This still isn't fast enough, time is of the essence...!)

It was in this way that the dragon accelerated even further on the road towards Jewelsaad Mine, leaving dust clouds and the screams of two boys trailing in its wake.

Chapter 10

Gossip – Girls’ Everyday

The following story occurred whilst Shirley was on her way to the Jewelsaad Mine.

The private school that was constructed in this town is relatively large by the standards of the Kingdom, with 40 students split into six classes across three grades.

One of the main reasons why there are such a number of children in this adventurer’s town is because of the sizeable orphanage that used to exist on the site the school was built on.

In this world, orphaned children are not uncommon. All the more if they are the children of soldiers or adventurers. The Guild Master bought the orphanage and developed into a school some time ago in order to better support the children’s futures, and it’s this school that Shirley’s beloved daughters attend.

It was ten years ago that the mother and her two daughters had arrived. Raised with such tender love, Sophie and Tio had grown to become beautiful and well-mannered children.

Even if they didn’t quite understand the full scope of what being an adventurer means, they understood that their mother was putting her life on the line every day for them, and did their best to relieve the burden on her in whatever small ways they could despite being only ten years old.

Those girls are also quite the celebrities at school amongst the children around their age. It only makes sense, with their snow-white hair and rare good looks.

And those stunningly colourful eyes draw gazes from all around.

“O-i! You grey haired old lady!”

“You have the same colour hair as my grandma!”

“Hey! Don’t call it grey hair!”

But of course, standing out so much leads to its own problems for those children.

Ten-year-old boys will often go to lengths to tease and provoke the object of their interest, not quite understanding their own feelings.

Because of those circumstances, it's rare to see those two girls ever hanging out with boys.

Even though all the boys want to talk to the two beauties, they would have to face the jealousy and pressure of the other boys.

But even if a boy plucked up his courage and managed to approach them...

"Mm. Sorry, I can't."

Many a boy has been sunk by that refusal.

Originally the girls in the class were jealous of the twin's beauty and the attention they got, but eventually, let go of that envy after seeing they had no interest in boys. So long as it's only other girls who get close, that silly mother of theirs will be relieved as well.

That way, despite their complicated past, Sophie and Tio had an enjoyable school life with many friends. Of course, being a student has its fair share of troubles.

"Right then, tomorrow's test will be 50 questions on the continental common tongue, so I expect you all to prepare properly. Anyone who gets less than half correct will have to take supplementary lessons, are we clear?"

All the male students raise groans of protest at the homeroom teacher's announcement at the end of the period.

Not just a surprise test, but the threat of supplementary lessons! The homeroom teacher kept his cool as the class threatened to revolt.

"The test will assess how much you've been paying attention in class. By the way, even if you have something 'urgent' to do at home, that's okay. I'll simply schedule your supplementary lessons for another day."

As the students boo him loudly, the teacher strides out of the room with a laugh.

After school ended for the day and the students packed up to go home, Tio slumped over her desk.

“...I wish all the world’s tests were destroyed.”

“I know how you feel, but you can’t run away from reality.”

Sophie looked on as her younger sister tried to cast a curse under her breath.

For Tio, studying is a Sisyphean task. She does try to study seriously because of everything her mother goes through in order to let her go to school, but she can’t help it if something is beyond her.

“I know it’s important to read and write, but I hate how hard it is to remember everything.”

“There’s no point in complaining, everything in class relies on reading and writing.”

Unlike math where learning a single formula can unravel many calculations, literacy requires memorizing all sorts of spelling and grammar rules.

Tio is surprisingly fit. If one only took physical education into account, she would be an outstanding student, but when she has to sit in class for a long time she has a tendency to fall asleep.

“It’s so hard to stay awake during regular classes, I don’t know if I could make it through a supplementary lesson...”

“Ah, jeez. If you really don’t want to do the supplementary class that much, why don’t you work hard and focus on the test? I’ll help you study.”

“Ohh, Sophie’s beginning to sound like an older sister...”

“Of course. I am Tio’s older sister, after all.”

Tio looks up with those sleepy red eyes at her sister, who is puffing out her thin chest and has a proud look on that pretty face of hers.

Although Sophie and Tio were born on the same day and have very similar faces, their personalities are wildly different and they also have differing strengths and

weaknesses.

Compared to Tio who excels in athletics, Sophie is the best student in their grade.

Although Sophie isn't incredible at athletics, she can't be described as bad at it and is considered an honour student at the school. Just when was it that she began to take pride in being the eldest of the twins?

"Hey, mama. Between me and Tio, who is the older sister?"

"You were both born on the same day... But since Sophie came out first, I suppose you're the older sister"

Before they entered school for the first time, Sophie had suddenly remembered that conversation she had when she was younger. From that time on, she tried to carry herself as an older sister.

"Anyways, mama said that even adventurers need to know how to read and write, so let's do our best!"

Both of them hold the same dream for the future, unbeknownst to Shirley. They want to adventure side by side with their mother and travel the world as a family.

They heard from the adventurers who lived in the Deficit House that although the world is a cruel place, it is many degrees more beautiful.

The Crystal Valley, where the very rock seems to shine.

A beautiful natural garden of flowers known as the Fairy Paradise, found near the peak of a mountain no ordinary human could climb.

The King of the Sky whose plumage is like a rainbow, bringing luck and happiness to all those who see him.

Because of how dangerous it is, Shirley would surely be opposed. However, it would be a lot of fun if the three of them could see those sights together. Even that mother of theirs who doesn't care about things other than them would be able to enjoy herself.

"Mm... Okay, I'll do my best to study. I'll escape the supplementary lesson with all my might."

"You put a lot of emphasis on the last part, but oh well. Then, let's go home-"

"Oh, if that's the case, how about we come along with you?"

As the twins get ready to leave, they're approached by two girls in the nearly empty classroom. There's a third girl with a shy smile standing behind them.

"Lisa and Chelsea?"

"Mira as well. What's up?"

All three of these girls had been friends with the pair of them since they entered school.

"Ah, well, it's just that we didn't want to take supplementary lessons either. We were hoping that Sophie-sensei could teach us."

The tallest girl amongst them, Lisa, asks with both her hands clasped together. The girl with narrow eyes, Chelsea, leans against Sophie's back.

"Heeey, pleaaaase? If I study alone it will just be a waaaaste, I really don't want to take supplementary lessoooons."

"Wait, Chelsea! You're heavy!"

The girl with the rare black hair and eyes helped peel Chelsea off Sophie... Even though she didn't do anything wrong, Mira still apologized.

"Sorry about this, you two. Can I also study with you?"

"That's fine, but it's unusual to see Mira together with those two. What's wrong?"

"Oi oi, Tio? What does that mean exactly?"

Ignoring Lisa, Tio asked Mira.

Disregarding Lisa and Chelsea who were just as bad at studying as Tio, Mira was quite a studious girl, if not to the same degree as Sophie is.

Since she was already good at studying, she had never needed to join these last-minute

study sessions, so something must have gone wrong.

"I was trying to help Chelsea and Lisa study but... It's just too much for me to do on my own."

"If that's the case it's fine... You're okay with it, right, Tio?"

"Mm."

Tio nods, there's no problem.

"Then, where should we study?"

"Oh, I should have said earlier, but my house is no good today. My dad is throwing a party and it's going to be really noisy."

"My house is a no go as well. The younger kids will make too much noise, studying would be impossible~"

"Sorry, my mum and dad are working from home, I don't think we'd have a place to study properly."

"Well, that just leaves our place."

In that way, with a triple greeting, the guests entered Shirley's place at the Deficit House.

One of the three rooms was used as a living room, and the girls sat around the large table in it. As Sophie and Tio prepared drinks for the rest of the study group and delivered them on a tray, Chelsea looked around and asked

"Is Ms Shirley not here today?"

"Nope. She had to go far away for a guild request."

"Usually she would help me with studying."

Shirley was known to turn down requests just so that she could help Tio and Sophie study, whenever she was away during a test Tio's grades would suffer.

“But, isn’t it great? Being able to study with a strong adventurer who also has a G-cup... My brother who is an adventurer always talks about her. I wish I had a mother like that.”

“Mmm, yeah, it’s grea- Why do you know mama’s bust size!?”

“Eh!? I just thought they were really big when I first saw them... Are they really G-cup!?”

“Woah, really!? I knew they were big, but that’s crazy!”

And so, a lively discussion began about that woman’s bosom. As Tio who often used that same bust as a pillow weighed in with “They really are comfortable to sleep on”, she suddenly realized something herself.

(Speaking of mum, where did she study?)

Her mother isn’t just capable of reading and writing, she’s well versed in the history and economy of all the neighbouring countries.

Not once since having arrived in this town at the invitation of the guild master had she ever seen her mother studying.

Even if it wasn’t something that worried her, she couldn’t help but wonder. Her train of thought was interrupted when Mira spoke over the throng.

“A-anyways you three. If we waste any more time, we won’t get any study done at all? Right?”

Before they had realized it, the study group had become a fan club for a thirty-year-old mother of two. After being admonished by Mira, the rest of them quickly took out their textbooks and study notes.

Ugh... Argh... As Sophie and Mira did their best to teach the other three who kept groaning like zombies, eventually after two hours their concentration waned and the subject drifted back to the original topic.

“Woah...”

“Huge...”

“Listen, can you not make such sounds whilst looking through mama’s underwear?”

Inevitably, the guests started to explore the house. After Sophie snatched back the bra that Chelsea had been admiring, she found a box with a layer of cloth on top of it that she pulled off.

“It’s a treasure chest!”

As if it was something out of a story, it really did look like a treasure chest.

“Lemme see lemme see... Hm? Something is carved on it?”

“The Hero’s... Toolbox? What does that mean?”

“Ah, that’s mama’s toolbox for work, you won’t be able to open i-”

“We have no choice but to open it! Let’s do this, Chelsea!”

“Roger that!”

“Why won’t it opeeeeeeeeeeeeeen!?”

They both tried at the same time to open the lid like they were treasure hunters, but it didn’t even budge, like it had been welded shut.

“Looking closely, there’s no keyhole, does she really use this?”

“There has to be one somewhere...”

After failing to find that elusive keyhole, Lisa and Chelsea had to give up on opening the treasure chest.

But the two of them soon eyed new prey... On the well organized bookshelf, there was one book that read ‘Daughters Growth Record’ on the spine.

As they leafed through the book, they were surprised to see images on the pages that looked like they were taken from the scene itself.

“This is a picture, right? Did Ms. Shirley have a projector?”

A state of the art magic tool that was developed and began to circulate about six years ago that made it possible to capture images of landscapes and people, but they were hideously expensive making the number of owners incredibly small.

"No. Mrs. Martha, the woman who runs the inn... It's her hobby, she took all those pictures."

Before they knew it, all of the girls were reading through the book.

There were four photographs on each page, and under each of them in beautiful handwriting was written a time, date and brief description, which roused old memories for the twins.

They looked through the book for a long time, but just before they were about to return to studying, Lisa noticed something.

"Isn't it weird that before eight years old, it looks like Tio is the one dragging Sophie around?"

"That's true... Looking at this, you would think that Tio is the older sister?"

Sophie's shoulders jump with a start.

Every single photograph in the book is of the twins, and in the pictures taken before entering school, there are many shots in which Sophie is tugging on Tio's sleeve or holding her hand whilst crying.

"Hmm, seems like Sophie might be the big sister now, but it was the opposite before?"

"T-that's wrong! Those pictures are misleading!"

"Can you still say that after looking at this?"

Chelsea points at a newly turned page. On that page was an image of Tio comforting Sophie who was crying next to a bed with a large stain dried on it.

"Sophie, six-years-old. An incident on a certain day. Martha seemed amused when she gave me the photo."

In the attached caption, Sophie's embarrassment had been recorded for posterity.

“W-Why are you keeping pictures like this mamaaaaaaa!?”

Sophie's face turns bright red and she tries to grab the album.

Since she had never actually looked through the growth record book, she never could have imagined that it contained such embarrassing photos.

“I-it's okay Sophie! Everyone had leaks sometimes when they were kids!”

“Thank you for trying to comfort me Mira... But please don't say ‘leak’ so clearly...!”

“Really though, Sophie and Tio's positions really did reverse.”

“Wasn't it weird when Sophie started to say that she was the older sister?”

“Hm...”

Tio looked at the ceiling as she thought hard, then answered:

“Even if it was a little weird at first, maybe it is for the best that Sophie is the older sister. It was a real relief to me to see my crybaby sister start to become a little reliable.”

“...”

Even if she should have gotten angry at the last part of that speech, Sophie just whimpers softly.

Her dignity as the older sister had just completely fallen apart.

Chapter 11

The Camp's First Act

“Achoo!”

A cute sneeze.

It’s an old legend that a sneeze is a sign that someone far away is talking about you, but Shirley doesn’t believe in that.

Although, for some reason, she’s had a bad feeling for the last half hour. There’s no basis for it, but it’s like there’s an daughter at home who is struggling with studying for a surprise test without her mother there to help her... That kind of bad feeling.

(Kuh... I need to go home right now... No, wait, it could just be a false intuition... Uu, what do I do!?)

Shirley looked up to the heavens with a troubled expression on her face as she filled up her waterskin in the river.

(Shirley has such a painful expression... It must be some deep worry I couldn’t even begin to understand.)

Looking at Shirley who seemed to be immersed in some unknown torment, Kyle completely misunderstands as he walks by with an armful of kindling.

“You two, we’re ready.”

Asterios had set a ring of fist-sized stones.

“Hey! Is this good enough for the dried food!?”

Mixing dried vegetables, potatoes and beans together, Leia asked about the seasoning.

“Uu... I feel sick... I’m gonna hurl...”

Cudd lay on the ground with a green looking face, his head resting on his pack.

"That much will do. Let's start cooking."

They had travelled the entire day without pause, but now they made camp in a wasteland, Jewelsaad within sight.

The night is their enemy. They decided to camp here for the night, as attempting to assault the mine in this darkness was folly.

Sitting next to Rangitz, the dragon that had taken them this far who was now chewing on a mixture of meat and hay, Kyle began to light a fire by using flint stones in the way that Asterios was instructing him.

Even a third-rate magician can make fire with magic. But out in the wilderness, where a monster could attack at any moment, magic needed to be preserved as much as possible.

"Did you suffer any bumps or bruises during the ride, Kyle?"

"No... At least not to the extent that it will slow me down."

He said as much, but his rear end had taken such a pummeling riding the wagon that he was determined to find something to use as a pillow for next time.

"Ah... That sobering pill finally worked..."

"Ahahaha, steady on theeeeere! You still look a little groggy, don'tcha?"

"Shaddup, you shitty little brat...!"

In addition to the pain in his buttocks, Cudd had also had a nasty dose of motion sickness. As evidenced by how little power the voice he's trying to get back at Leia has.

The pill had finally taken enough effect that he can at least eat, but it may take some more time for him to recover fully.

"But, isn't it weird...? Why is it just Kyle and I got banged up, but everyone else is just fine...?"

"Yeah... I mean, I understand Asterios being fine, but Leia and Shirley?"

"I had laid down a cushion beforehand."

"I floated the whole time. There's no way I would've been able to sit normally with it shaking like that."

It seems like these two took proper measures, despite how crazy the situation was.

For the two who had simply screamed the entire way there, they didn't have much they could say for themselves.

"Either way, you should consider this training. This is supposed to be a squad to train rookies, after all."

Shirley said so quietly as she gazed at the pot bubbling over the fire.

The dry food and the meat broiled in the pot, the smell of the slowly fusing ingredients was very pleasant.

"As you climb the ranks, there'll be more opportunities to travel via dragon. They're important for journeying, but did you know that the riding on dragonback is even more thrilling than riding in the wagon?"

The veteran adventurer seems to threaten them with a light tone as she adds some more water to the pot as it simmers and covers the lid back up.

As Kyle and Cudd look at her in disbelief, and Leia's eyes light up with curiosity, Asterios laughs as he coincides with Shirley.

"That's right. It's a must-have for adventurers and knights, but if an inexperienced rider falls from a dragon running through a forest or flying through the sky, they'll be in real trouble."

"Please don't jinx us..."

Kyle and Cudd tremble at the mere thought of it.

"Alright, it's done."

“Oh, that looks tasty!”

After timing it to perfection, Shirley opened the lid on the pot and added the final bit of seasoning before serving.

“Saying that, this has meat in it, are you fine with that Asterios and Leia?”

“Yes, it’s not an issue.”

“I’m fine since I’m not a pure blooded elf.”

Unlike pure elves who only eat plants as if they were grazing animals, some beastfolk and half-elves have no qualms about eating meat like a human.

Although for the most part they will have vegetables as the staple part of their diet, many beastfolk and half-elves enjoy meat.

“Oh, that’s good. I didn’t realize how hungry I was myself.”

She typically got by with portable meals and bread during adventures, so this was a treat.

The soup had a gentle taste from the vegetables used as its base, punctuated with the subtle salty flavour of the seasoned meat.

Even though spring had started, the nights were still cold, and the young adventurers consistently asked for refills of the body warming soup until the pot lay empty.

“What made you want to be an adventurer in the first place, Shirley?”

When their bellies were filled up and they were beginning to ponder sleep, Leia asked Shirley out of curiosity.

“...Is that something I really have to answer?”

“Not really, but is it something that bothers you? I just wanted to know more about you, since we’re partying together and all.”

Even though Shirley glares at her, the cheerful half-elf doesn’t seem to mind.

It would be easy to stay silent here, but that might cause a rift in the party between the two.

As if poisoned by those curious golden eyes, the Demonic White Sword who had been isolated in that unfriendly guild decided to talk.

“It’s not an especially unique reason. I did it to support my two daughters.”

“Dau... Daughters!? Shirley, you’re married!?”

“Seriously!? And this young!?”

“Young... I’m a middle-aged woman who just turned 30, you know. Having a daughter at my age isn’t such a strange thing.”

“That’s right, Shirley was part-immortal...”

Kyle had almost forgotten that fact and had also thought that Shirley was in her late teens. Certainly, having a daughter at that age isn’t strange, but for some reason it caused an uncomfortable feeling to swirl in Kyle’s chest.

“Um... So, does that mean you have a husband, Miss Shirley...?”

“No. I raised them alone and unmarried because... Well... There were a lot of circumstances.”

Saying that Shirley refused to say anything more, and stood up.

Was that strange feeling in his chest just his imagination? It was like it had never existed when she said that.

“It’s getting late. I’ll take first watch, but first I’ll go and spread a deterrent around camp.”

“Okay, we’ll leave it to you.”

As Shirley left with a bottle of fragrance that is designed to repel monsters, Leia watched her go and then spoke softly.

“When you’re semi-immortal, all your wounds quickly regenerate, right? That means

Miss Shirley never has to worry about getting injured or dying during battle. It's no wonder she's famous, doing all that with such a delicate looking body."

"Idioooot. It isn't such a convenient power as that. A semi-immortal is literally an incomplete immortal. You're not just short in height, but also short on brain power, huh?"

"Haaaa!? Who did you just call short, you spew man!?"

"Bwuh!? Y-you!? Kicking me in the face is going too far!!"

Kyle wants to interfere, but Asterios holds him back by the shoulder and simply shakes his head.

At this point, it's better to just leave them be and go to sleep, seems to be what he's saying. Although Kyle was still worried about what Cudd had said before and asked Asterios about it.

"Um, earlier Cudd said that semi-immortal people are 'incomplete immortals', what did he mean by that?"

Technically, any creatures off sufficiently high intelligence have been known to achieve semi-immortality, but their numbers amongst humans are still exceptionally low.

For that reason, there were very few people who knew the exact details about the condition, and Kyle was anxious to find out more about this type of immortality.

"An incomplete immortal... Well, it's certainly true. I've never heard of any 'immortal' being truly immortal, and semi immortals are the same. I've fought semi-immortal creatures before, and my conclusion is that if you destroy the brain, they'll die just like anything else."

Asterios tapped his forehead twice.

A semi-immortal born from the amalgamation of mind, body and soul will not be able to recover if both the mind and body are damaged by a blow to the brain.

The prevailing theory is that the capacity for regeneration is lost if the brain is damaged.

"Not to mention, that regeneration ability can also be a weakness in of itself."

"Eh? What do you mean? The way I see it, there's no way that body regeneration is anything but a strength."

"Cudd said it himself just earlier, there's no such convenient ability that can simply restore body parts and heal wounds indefinitely. All of that healing takes up a lot of energy."

Both physical and magical energy. Both the body and the soul are sapped in order to regenerate... Even if an ordinary person gained the secret of immortality, they likely wouldn't be able to regenerate a finger, much less regenerate an entire body from the neck down.

"That forced regeneration is the weak point. Of course, it's fine if you can just finish it off with a single blow, but fatigue will set in very quickly if you simply attack at its non-vitals first by forcing it to regenerate."

All famous monsters have their weaknesses like the inverted scale of a dragon or the effect of sunlight on a vampire, but it's rare for the greatest strength and weakness of a being to be the same like a semi-immortal.

"Of course, that's not to say that semi immortals are weak. They usually gain an exceptional talent upon awakening."

This exceptional talent is a type of supernatural ability that doesn't rely upon knowledge of magecraft. Originally, semi immortals awoke with petrifying eyes like a basilisk's, but eventually unique powers began to appear.

Because of their strength, they are sometimes hunted as monsters themselves, all the more so because that power typically far outstrips anything conventional magic can offer.

"In other words, for a semi-immortal, the ability to restore their body is just where they got their moniker, the real value is far more than just a body that never ages."

"I've fought a semi-immortal that could conjure and control flames, I wonder what kind of talents Shirley herself has. Whatever it is, she probably isn't about to tell us."

Kyle turned her attention to the direction Shirley left in.

What was on the mind of that lone swordsman, who struggled to balance on the fine line between human and monster whilst doing her best to raise their daughters?

He looked on with a sense of sadness. As he did, his chest began to swirl with those similar feelings.

(I want to repay her in some way... But what could I possibly do for her...?)

In order to realize his feelings for her, he needed to become strong enough to be someone that could stand by her side. But that dream was as tall as the heavens and as fleeting as a shooting star.

Meanwhile, Shirley has her own troubles.

“Fuuu... I need to replenish my daughter energy..... Haa... I’m healed...”

As she was ringing the campsite with fragrance, that doting mother stared at the photograph of her daughters that she had hidden in a pocketwatch kept between her breasts, and sighed with delight as she made a full recovery.

Chapter 12

The Morning After

As dawn broke, the light of the sun seemed to illuminate the mountain where the Jewelsaad Mine lay.

Piercing the ground around the dragon pulling the wagon with sacred nails, blessed by the church, Asterios rang the bell that hung around his neck.

A refreshing timbre rang out. This is his magic, that allows him to bend natural laws.

The fifteen nails in the ground were connected by light and began to form a surface. In this way, a barrier was formed.

“With this, it will be impossible for the dragon to be attacked or escape whilst we’re inside the mine.”

In order to maintain magical phenomena, energy must be consistently applied to it.

If the magic user simply leaves and the supply of magical energy is cut off, the magic will soon lose its physical form and be scattered to the wind.

In order to prevent this, a number of magical tools and implements have been developed, included among these are the holy nails.

“From here on out, we will start the subjugation of the monsters in Jewelsaad Mine. I want everyone to double check their equipment and weapons. We’ll begin to move as soon as everyone is ready.”

Everyone nodded, and Asterios, Kyle and the other E-Rank adventurers began to inspect all their equipment thoroughly. Shirley, meanwhile, simply gave her pouch a quick look over and then turned her attention back to the mine’s entrance.

“Miss Shirley, don’t you need to check your weapons?”

“You say that, but isn’t she unarmed?”

To satisfy Cudd and Leia who were looking at her dubiously, Shirley extended an arm and grasped in that hand that had held nothing just a moment before there was now a curved sword.

“You don’t have to worry about me, I’m well prepared.”

“Ho, what an unusual sight. Is that some kind of spatial magic?”

Standing next to the two young adventurers, Asterios looked at the rare display.

“I’ve heard that there were only a few practitioners of that magic in the world, is Shirley one of them?”

“No. This is just the application of that magic tool the witch gave me. It’s helpful since swords can lose their edge so quickly if they get wet with blood.”

“Application... I have plenty of questions, but somehow I doubt you’ll be giving me any answers.”

“True. ‘Only a fool boasts about the hand that is dealt to them’, as the saying goes.”

A popular saying amongst adventurers. Asterios decides not to push her any further on it.

“But, really. To borrow the power of that witch, you must have offered something excellent in exchange.”

“Hey, I’ve been wondering for a while now, but by ‘witch’ you couldn’t possibly mean the Guild Master, right?”

Leia asked doubtfully.

“Exactly right. Even though there are many female adventurers who can use magic, she’s the only one referred to as a ‘witch’.”

“Hmm... Well, it sure is a strange thing to use as a weapon.”

“I can say the same to you as well.

Compared to Cudd with his single dagger and Kyle with his club studded with metal

nails, Leia takes great pride in maintaining her dwarven crossbow.

"Even if you're not a purebred, I thought elves were supposed to be very attached to the regular bow – it's strange to see one use a machination of the dwarves, a race they seem to constantly be in conflict with."

"Well, since I was raised in the Kingdom, I've never really met many dwarves. But Dimros is really kind to me."

"Leia, you're also a customer at Dimros' shop?"

"Yep. He's been really nice to me ever since I first came to town... Wait, Shirley, you also go to his shop!?"

The two girls had found something in common, unexpectedly.

"There are many blacksmiths in the city, but he's the most skilled among them."

"I agree! I also have a bow, you know, but I prefer using this crossbow."

"Because your arms are too tiny to draw a bow right."

Leia kicked Cudd in the shin without saying a word. Although a regular bow can probably outrange a crossbow, with her childlike body she likely doesn't have the strength necessary to do so.

"One more thing, Shirley. If possible, before the young ones enter the mine, I was hoping you could retrieve the corpse of a bad bonobo."

"I don't mind, but why?"

"Well, I want to lure the rest of them out with <Hate Area>."

A type of magic used as a strategy against large groups of enemies. <Hate Area> is one of these spells, but the ritual requires a dead body of one of the enemy group.

But, this kind of magic is considered to be entirely unethical by the church and its practice is nearly taboo, something a monk in the service of the church shouldn't ever be seen doing.

“...By any chance, has anyone ever called you a rebellious monk?”

“What are you saying? Yes, this technique is unethical, but I would rather use such a thing than see an ally killed simply because I decided not to use it.”

“I agree with you.”

Whilst using such a ritual is an affront to his faith, letting others die on his account would be an even more grave offense in the eyes of the Goddess.

Not every battle can be won cleanly. Even if the priests in their lavish churches might be offended by the idea, it is the warrior monks who have to bear these hardships for the sake of their comrades.

“Well then, if I’m doing this, I’ll take the scout with me. May as well do some rookie training whilst we’re at it.”

“Eh? Me?”

Cudd, who was busy fighting tooth and nail with Leia, suddenly looked up.

“Before I go, I just have one question. Are you able to use the magic called <Silence>? I know it’s very useful for a scout.”

“Ah, yes, I can.”

“Then there’s no problem. Follow me.”

Shirley turns her back on the group and heads toward the mine. After looking at Asterios doubtfully and receiving a hard to discern expression from that cow-like face, he chased after the white-haired woman.

They went up the side of the mountain climbing up moss covered craggy rocks, with faint voices from inside the mine carrying on the wind.

They are the shrieks of the monkeys that swarm the mine, and just the thought of a dragon being behind all that is enough to make one’s skin crawl.

“All we have to do is kill one of those monkeys and bring its body back. But, if we cause a commotion before our real attack, we’re going to be in trouble. We need to collect a

corpse without alerting any of his friends nearby, but do you know how we'd do that?

"Eh?"

Weren't you supposed to know? As Cudd stares at her in confusion, Shirley keeps talking.

"Imagination is the adventurer's strongest weapon. You have to constantly imagine what your opponent can do, and what you can do in return. If you stop thinking, you will die."

"T-that's true."

"I'll follow your instructions, so you should make use of your skills and gear to do what you can."

Apparently, Shirley teaches by making others think for themselves. Although he wants to argue, there's not really any way he could say that's she's wrong.

(It's just... These enemies are never in groups of less than three...)

He knows that much, but he still hasn't been able to see the situation inside the mine. For now, he'll scout it out.

"<Silence • Begin>"

An invisible magical field surrounded him as he muttered that small chant under his breath. A type of scouting magic, <Silent Field> seals all sound made within that magic field.

With Cudd's current magical power, he can only extend the field 25 meters around him, but that's enough for the current party.

But for now, it doesn't need to be that big. Making the field big enough only to cover himself and Shirley, they begin to explore the cave.

(There they are!)

It didn't take much exploring to find the monsters they were after. From the back, they looked like normal monkeys, but the four bonobos with jet black fur had three horns

sprouting from the tops of their heads and sharp fangs.

(Alright, they're not looking at us... Stay calm... Wait, that one... why does it have a staff?)

Different from the three other monkeys who held slings, one of them held a staff. It seems like something he was told about, but he just can't remember exactly what it was.

Cudd frowned as he tried to remember. Meanwhile, Shirley took a dagger that had appeared in her hand and sliced up a nearby rock.

Whilst enveloped by the silent space, she cut characters into the stone as easily as if she were carving it into a wedge of cheese.

"Stone slingers, three. Magician, one."

She must have read his worried expression But thanks to that, Cudd remembered that the staff-wielding bonobos were capable of magic.

(The question is, how do we get one without it screaming out?)

He thought of sneaking up on it and eliminating it within his <Silent Field>.

But, the problem is that if he failed and it escaped his field, it would cause a commotion and alert all its friends.

Since Cudd can't guarantee that he can eliminate the magician in the silent field, he scribbled a question to Shirley in the notebook he kept in his pack.

"If I attempt to eliminate the magician within my <Silent Field>, is it possible for you to deal with the other three enemies at the same time?"

It would be incredibly difficult for Cudd to envelop all of the monkeys within his silent field without being noticed.

Since he would be noticed if he approached closely enough to envelop them all, he can only go after one. And since the most dangerous one is the magician, he'll target that one.

So, he will leave the others to her. Although he's frustrated by his own lack of ability, he decided to rely on the veteran adventurer with him in order to complete the mission.

However, he realizes that he's also asking for the impossible. It really is a ridiculous request, how could anyone kill all three monkeys quickly enough that none of them would be able to make a sound-?

"No problem. Let's go with that plan."

Cudd is genuinely surprised when he saw that carved into the rock. Although he didn't think it was possible, at Shirley's approval he took 30 seconds to expand the range of his <Silent Field>.

"Ha..."

The very moment that the magician monkey was caught in the silent field, a curved sword appeared in Shirley's hand and she began to move.

A sudden attack on the bonobo in the blind spot of the magician. Cudd couldn't even grasp her movement, to him it looked like a whirlwind of white flashing across his vision.

The moment that blur of white hair passed by the first monkey, it was already gushing blood from the stump that remained of its neck. The other two monkeys apart from the magician's eyes grew wide and they were about to scream out, but the blade flashed twice again and once more blood gushed from two stump necks.

(I'm not even needed at all here!?)

The magician monkey still hadn't noticed Shirley who had dispatched its fellows within half a second.

In fact, it seems as if Shirley has intentionally left it for him, as Cudd approached it stealthily.

Cudd jumped out from behind an outcrop of rock and rushed the magician monkey, still somewhat in shock that his reckless plan was actually working.

"...!!...!?!?"

Seeing Cudd rush at him, he attempted to scream for help, but his voice does not carry inside the silent field.

It attempted to chant magic to defend itself, but not being able to talk at all it ends in failure.

For a magic user who can activate magic using tools or their mind, this wouldn't be an issue, but for a magician that relies on their voice, <Silent Field> is a deadly counter.

Completely confused by the situation and unable to use magic, the bonobo tries to turn to flee, but Cudd manages to grab it by the back of the head and uses his dagger to slit its throat.

"Even if you were a bit slow to act sometimes... I guess that caution isn't always bad. You have the making of a good scout, once you get more experience."

Once he exhaled and released the silent field, he heard Shirley talking to him.

Being praised by the only person who made his impossible strategy possible, Cudd's cheeks turn red with embarrassment.

"But, there's one thing I can't overlook. You need to stop using your voice to activate silent field. You need to be able to activate it within 2 seconds without verbalizing it. Also, you need to be far more precise with your movements."

Just as soon as he was given the carrot, he's hit with the stick. It's true that he spent far too long expanding the range of his field since he couldn't verbalize his spell.

"Well, anyways, we can't afford to let the other corpses fester for too long. Let's bury them before the other bad bonobos find them and make a ruckus."

"Oh, then, I'll use my earth magic."

Like the swords beforehand, Shirley seemed to pull a shovel out of thin air. Once they had finished burying the other three monkeys using the shovel and earth magic, they returned to where Asterios and the others were with the remaining corpse.

Chapter 13

The Battle Begins

“We brought it.”

“Ooh, this is perfect.”

After passing him the corpse of the bonobo, Asterios nailed it to a simply built wooden cross that Cudd and Shirley then helped him raise in the middle of a magic circle.

“With this, the preparations are complete. Now we just need to wait for the other two to return.”

“Where are they?”

Cudd asked about the whereabouts of Kyle and Leia. Asterios pointed one of the holy nails towards the mountain as he answered.

“The two of them are setting up similar magic circles around the mountain. They should be back soon.”

“We’re back!”

Just as soon as he had said so, Kyle and Leia indeed came back.

“Have you two finished your preparations?”

“Yes, we’re ready.”

Asterios nodded as the two of them caught their breath, then rang his bell.

Light originating from the established magical circles formed a barrier in an hourglass shape between their position and the mine. Shirley was impressed that despite using such large-scale magic, Asterios didn’t seem fatigued at all.

“To so effortlessly create a magic barrier that large with such simple preparations...

I'm surprised it only took one ring of the bell."

"If it were a smaller boundary, I would not have had to use the bell at all. That said, let us begin."

The E-Rank adventurers tense up at the commencement of their strategy.

"<Coordinate • Fixed>"

As Asterios chanted the two-verse spell, a blue flame ignited from the magic circle swallowed the crucified corpse of the bad bonobo.

"<INSANE MONKEYS OF THE BEJEWELLED MOUNTAIN • BATHE IN THIS LIGHT LIKE MOTHS TO A FLAME • AND BEHOLD THE REMAINS OF YOUR COMRADE>!"

Even if he was skilled enough to raise the barrier with a simple ring of the bell, strategic magic of this complexity was something else entirely.

As soon as he had finished singing those three verses with a booming voice, a cacophony of roars that seemed to shake the very mountain rose up inside the mine.

"Uwaa!? T-they're coming!"

A long black cloud descended from the mine's entrance... No, not a cloud, but a stream of enraged bad bonobos.

The crazy monkeys that sweep down to attack the party are frothing at the mouth with bloodshot eyes, seeming nothing like the intelligent monsters they were before.

The strategic magic called <Hate Area> is a spell that maddens and draws the attention of a large group of enemies by burning the corpse of one of their group with a magical flame.

The magical influences all the targeted monsters in a wide area, and it's especially effective against monsters with inherently low magical resistance that operate in herds or colonies, such as goblins or bad bonobos.

It's also a magic that is often used in human wars. Although it may seem like drawing a large number of enemies towards you is a disadvantage, the reality is that it's very easy to set a trap as those same enemies are completely heedless of any danger in

their single-minded desire to kill.

“Guwagh!? Gororororo!!”

The hourglass-like barrier constricts the flow of the bonobos.

The monkeys cram into the narrowing passage in an attempt to attack the adventurers, with many becoming trapped and many more getting trampled underfoot.

It took a while, but eventually, a young bonobo managed to squeeze through. Even though one of its arms is already dislocated and broken from the struggle, its eyes are full of hatred as it looks to rush at the human beings before him, but-

“Yaaaaaaaaah!”

“Gyab... agh!”

A club is swung with force at its head, and one of the nails hammered into it pierces its skull.

The maddened monsters no longer have the intelligence to use tools or magic to break through this situation.

All they can do is be trampled to death by their comrades before making it through the chokepoint, or drag themselves through bloody and battered.

“Guaggggga!!”

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaaaao!!”

“Gyaa!! Gaaaaaaaaawgaaaaaw!!”

But, they no longer feel pain. With their fangs bared and nails flashing, three more bad bonobos tear through the gap and jump at their enemy’s throat.

“Nwuuuo!!”

With a single blow from the war ax, the bodies of the three monkeys are cleaved in half, their blood raining on Asterios.

The Minotaur who butchers the monsters left and right is from a race full of proud warrior clans, using his immense strength and powerful magic to protect his friends with his body and barriers, he is the very image of a dignified A-Rank adventurer.

“Gwaaaaaaaaaaao!!”

“Gagyaaa!!”

But, it isn't just injured bonobos who are managing to get through the narrowest point in the barrier.

On top of the pile of struggling monkeys, two individuals manage to jump over the top seemingly completely unharmed.

“Hey! Those ones aren't injured!”

“Leave them to me!”

Even if she doesn't have the strength or reach to pull back a regular bow, the shooting accuracy of those with elf blood running through their veins is second to none.

The dwarven built rapid-fire crossbow launches two bolts, both with harpoon-like tips that would be difficult to pull out.

They didn't quite hit where they were aimed. But, the bolts still pierced the bodies of the two bonobos. The two monkeys fell back from the recoil of the shots, but in their crazed state of mind an injury that light wouldn't be enough to stop them.

They both jumped back up immediately and rushed at Leia who had shot at them, but she held her ground and chanted a single word.

“<Ψ>!”

Flames erupted from the bolts, and the upper bodies of the bonobos were swallowed in fiery explosions.

Since time immemorial elves have been using runic magic to enhance the power of their archery, the magic of all different kinds are unleashed using a 24 character runic alphabet.

The runes are engraved into the arrowhead beforehand and the power is channelled during the shot, and the same applies to the bolts that Leia uses.

Whether it be bombs or poison, a skilled elf warrior can activate the spell with a single runic chant, that is the magic archery inherited by the half-elf.

“There’s no time to stand around!”

Determined not to lose out to Leia, Cudd started to cast earth magic to stop the growing number of bonobos who are breaking through the barrier.

Even though there are plenty of different types of magic in the world when it comes to combat none are more effective than earth magic since it can shape the very battlefield to one’s will.

“<GEOGRAPHY • SHIFT • PINCUSHION>!”

Numerous small rocky spikes smash through the ground and pierce the feet of three onrushing bonobos, causing them to fall and injure themselves further. It is the most elementary earth magic, <Needle Field>.

During a battle, the spell will turn the ground beneath the enemy into a rocky hazard. It both deprives them of mobility and injures them at the same time.

“You’re up!”

“Got it!”

At the bonobos who are injured on the ground, Kyle fires a <Fireball> and Leia unleashes another barrage of bolts.

The fire rages.

Instead of aiming to kill, the swings of the Minotaur’s battle axe are aimed at keeping the enemy back. Asterios shouted to Shirley as more earth magic and bolts are unleashed around him.

“Leave this to us. Before the dragon comes down on us, find its nest!”

This battle is merely the opening act. Shirley glared towards the peak of the mountain

where she predicts that nest is, and entrusts this battle to Asterios.

"You're the only one who can take on that dragon! Please leave the rest to us!"

"To be honest, I really wanted to fight it as well!"

"Shut up, you shitty little brat!"

In response to the party's words, Shirley nods silently.

Gripping curved blades in both hands, the Demonic White Sword leapt over the piling bodies of bonobos and cleaved through the necks of the ones who stood in her path as she ran.

As if rushing through a field of blossoming red flowers, the heads of the monkeys flew high into the sky as she ran towards the mine, leaving only fountains of blood where they used to be.

Every time a sword became dulled because of the blood, she would simply stick it into the heart, skull or neck of a bonobo and call another one into her hand as if it had always been there. Leia murmured in admiration.

"Hey, just who was it that said she didn't seem like anything special?"

"Wasn't that you? Wait, focus on the enemies! There's more coming!"

Leia shot more iron bolts towards the bonobos that just kept coming, shouting "I know, I know!" to Cudd, who used the body of a bonobo with a cut windpipe as a shield against another monkey rushing at him.

Shirley's prediction that the dragon would make its nest on the summit turned out to be correct, since she knew there wouldn't be a cave big enough in the mine to house a creature with that much pride.

As she approached the mountaintop, she didn't see any more bad bonobos. Judging by the throng of black haired monkeys she can see far below the mountaintop, Asterios must have drawn out all the bonobos in the mine.

The summit aside, she didn't see any signs of life as she rushed up the mountain, moving as if she were dancing and not breaking a sweat.

(Even so, this presence I'm feeling near the summit... It has to be a big one, right?)

'An air of pride' doesn't seem like merely a metaphor to Shirley right now.

In this dog eat dog world where only the strongest survive, the proud monsters that sit atop the food chain literally exude an atmosphere of strength.

Just how strong is the dragon that awaits her on the summit? It seems similar to the Black Dragon of the mountains and the Vampire Princess who attacked the capital she dealt with in the past.

(It's currently eight in the morning... If nothing gets in the way, I should make it back in time.)

She looked at the pocket watch she pulled from her cleavage and nodded confidently. If everything goes to plan, she should be able to eat dinner with her daughters tomorrow night.

If she had to deal with both the monkeys and the dragon herself, it might have taken her more than three days to make the round trip, so maybe teaming up with a party wasn't such a bad idea.

...Well, she still can't say for sure if she'll do something like this again, though.

"So, you've arrived."

Shirley, after scaling the mountain in record time, looks up at the dragon's nest and the gigantic monster at the centre of it.

It was about only slightly larger than the dragon she had fought against before. But, the difference in magical power is absolutely palpable, and this dragon has two sets of wings on either side of its body.

Even more distinctive is the horn that shines like a jewel on its head, a symbol of authority amongst dragons.

"Ho... I thought the monkeys were acting queerly, so that was your doing?"

In addition, a soaring intelligence that can even understand the language of many different cultures. Even if she wasn't fully aware of the details, Shirley could guess at just what was in front of her.

"An Ancient Dragon?"

"Kukuku... The very same."

Except for the dragon king, which was a unique existence, ancient dragons were the strongest dragons that existed in the physical realm.

They are immortal and accrue an immense amount of experience and knowledge in their old age, and are said to be a match for a party of S-rank adventurers.

Before this mighty foe, only a single B-rank adventurer stands. It's a fight that should be decided as soon as you read the titles of the combatants.

"Truly, for those monkeys to be so ensnared by man's chicanery. Resourceful they may be, but they remain a base creature. In the end, they were not worthy of being below me."

The ancient dragon speaks coldly as he blows air through his nose. For such a high ranking dragon, all other races are mere dirt to him.

As it lifts itself from the ground with its huge body, it is like a mythical beast from the old stories, and any ordinary warrior facing it would be rooted to the spot in fear.

"Very well, little human. In recognition of making it this far, I shall personally-

Those sonorous and proud words were cut off before they finished.

"I don't have time to listen to your monologues forever."

A small sound could be heard near the dragon's neck, then he landed heavily back on the ground.

Blood gushing from its mouth, the ancient dragon had no idea what had just happened.

The dragon was still wondering just when Shirley had managed to get behind it, as

blood poured out of its throat.

"I appreciate that you wanted to make a speech. But, unfortunately, I'm just not interested."

Instead of swinging the sword to clear away the blood that coated it, Shirley simply let it disappear and held a new one in its place the next second.

The injury she had inflicted was fatal, cutting a major blood vessel in the neck. The Demonic White Sword didn't relax her stance, and as the dragon lay in a pool of its own blood, it stared into those blue and red eyes that shined in the morning sun.

Chapter 14

Speeches are Silver, Silence is Gold

As the dragon still held itself slightly from a full collapse with its forepaw, Shirley naturally kept a strong grip on the sword in her hand.

For the upper strata of dragons, the ability to self-regenerate isn't uncommon. Was it a feature of their giant bodies? Was it their desire to battle on? Or, for this ancient dragon, was it simply a matter of pride? Regardless, they couldn't be compared to the dragons of the lower ranks.

Therefore, even if dealt a blow that would be fatal to a war dragon two ranks below it, it wouldn't be unusual for an ancient dragon to be able to regenerate such an injury.

However, this self-regeneration is not just an ancient dragon's natural trait, but something that is activated via magic. If one is killed instantly, such magic becomes meaningless.

The blow that Shirley dealt to the dragon's neck just before should have been a killing blow. She didn't just cut the blood vessels in its neck, she also tore through the back of its spine with the sword's shockwave.

Cutting both the spinal cords and the blood vessels in the neck was as good as severing its head. Even if her opponent is an ancient dragon, so long as it was mortal it should have died without having the chance to use its self-regeneration.

"This is... I've come across a rare one."

However, the grievous wound she had inflicted on the dragon's neck had begun to heal at a rate that far surpassed that self-regeneration magic.

It's a familiar sight to Shirley, who immediately understands the reason behind it.

"A semi-immortal dragon... I really did run into something troublesome in the end."

If you compare the monster currently in front of her to the one she was expecting to

fight, it certainly seems like a troublesome situation.

Any creature that lives long enough is bound to become abnormal in one way or another. That's why it's more common to see more long-lived races like dragons become semi-immortal when compared to humans, but it's still an incredibly rare sight.

What's more, it's easy to understand Shirley's exasperation when you consider that semi-immortal dragon has much more potential to continually restore themselves than a semi-immortal human.

If you struck four fatal blows against a semi-immortal human being, they would be completely unable to move because of how much energy the regeneration would use up, but a dragon's exhaustive magical energy reserves would be able to heal at least ten times as many fatal injuries.

“Kukuku, what is wrong? You wear a blank visage.”

The dragon spoke sadistically to Shirley who had just given him a supposedly fatal wound, guessing that she had become despondent out of hopelessness.

“You may be fleet of foot, but it is merely a cheap trick you employ, it is meaningless to one as mighty as myself.”

Shirley slashed the neck of the dragon before he even finished speaking.

“You...! To interrupt my speech not once, but twice...!”

“I don't have time to stand here listening to your dull speeches.”

As the dragon spat blood again and began to restore its wounds, Shirley took the pocket watch out to check the time again.

“So long as I kill you before noon, and finish up my main job not long after that, I should be able to have supper with my daughters tomorrow. For that sake, I need you to hurry up and die quickly”

For Shirley, the dragon was never her main concern. Even if it was an ancient dragon before her eyes, her main goal was finding beautiful materials for her daughters' coming-of-age gifts somewhere in the mine.

“You arrogant and wicked human...! Across the ages, I have never encountered such an impudent being as you...!!”

For the ancient dragon, being treated as a mere nuisance was an even worse wound than being pierced through its inverted scale, such was his pride.

“The arrogance! The impudence! Repent your misdeeds in the next world!”

It is said that there must be magic involved in a dragon’s flight, as its wings seem too small to support its body.

As its four wings fluttered to life, it kicked up a storm of dust with its legs as it took to the sky.

Why exactly are dragons considered the strongest monsters? Whilst its physical strength, magical energy and tough scales are formidable, what’s really dangerous is just how mobile it can be despite their large bodies, which make its attacks difficult to predict and also renders it hard to counter.

Apart from the water dragons which swim through the seas and the earth dragons that bore a path through the soil and rock, all other types of dragons can effortlessly take to the skies in this way, and what if it also utilized its fiery breath from such a height?

A normal human would be overwhelmed by a dragon’s raw physical strength, so what exactly could anyone do when stuck on the ground against such an airborne monster?

“...”

“Wha-!?”

Therefore, the dragon was taken by surprise when Shirley managed to reach the same heights as it had.

She didn’t use flight magic. A massive sword that could only belong to the race of giants was wedged into the ground at an angle, and Shirley had run up the length of it to mount the dragon’s back, stabbing a rapier through the vulnerable base of its wings.

“GWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!”

Having lost the ability to stay in the air due to the thrust of the sword, the old dragon fell back onto its rocky nest in agony. But, Shirley's attack isn't over yet.

Leaving the rapier in place, she grasps a new two-handed sword and runs up the side of the dragon's huge body. Having brought it down from the sky, all that remains is to strike quickly at the weak point for all semi-immortals, the brain.

Racing dexterously up its neck, she positioned herself to cut into the dragon's skull from the back of its head, when her blade was suddenly blocked by a barrier of blinding white light.

"...Damn."

It is somewhat different to Asterios' technique, but it is still barrier magic all the same. It's not unusual for a dragon of this rank to be able to use barrier magic, and Shirley would have been able to tear right through it, but the magic bought the dragon just enough time to shift his head and deflect Shirley's blade.

"That desperate to keep your head?"

The barrier around the dragon's skull was intended to protect its only real weakness as a semi-immortal. Jumping away from its head, Shirley begins to tear deep cuts into the dragon's body as she runs along its flank.

Skillfully slicing through the scales that are as tough as steel, Shirley began to cut the tendons and blood vessels the dragon needed to move its limbs at a faster rate than it could regenerate.

"Y-you...! The sheer arroga-!"

Shirley sliced his throat again, cutting short his speech a third time. The dragon thrashed around in its nest bleeding profusely, barely ten seconds having passed since it fell back to the earth.

It broke several bones and ruptured its internal organs when it landed. But, just as Shirley gripped a new sword in her hand, she was pushed back by a wave of magical energy that seemed to radiate from its entire body.

"Hm."

Shirley frowns. She had dealt at least ten fatal injuries to the dragon, but the magical energy it was using to heal those wounds didn't seem to be depleting.

(If anything, isn't it increasing?)

The wounds she was inflicting were being healed in seconds, and its physical strength was also intact. This was absurd.

Magical energy is supposed to only be able to replenish through rest, medicine or magical tools, but the dragon is not using any of the three techniques that Shirley knows of, as vast amounts of magical energy are being pumped into its body.

"I see... So this is your unique skill, huh?"

The supernatural phenomenon that resides in a body of an immortal, independent of magical power. She doesn't know the full details, but it seems like that is the basis for the dragon's regeneration of magical power.

"Kuhahaha! Have thou succumbed to despair afore my limitless magical power? Do you now grasp the gap betwixt us?"

The amount of wounds a semi-immortal being can recover is in direct correlation with their amount of magical power. So long as the head is protected, a semi-immortal being with infinite energy can regenerate wounds indefinitely, as if they were a true immortal.

Shirley wasn't underestimating the ancient dragon that was in front of her. She had come within inches of ending its life for good just before, only being stopped by the barrier it had formed on its head.

It was a cowardly act for such a proud dragon, but it was also the surest method it had of winning this battle.

"Whereas my wounds shall heal ad infinitum, you simply waste all your energy in vain. Even though thou boasted of striking me down afore noon, what good is that bravado if you work yourself to a standstill whilst I still live?"

If this cycle keeps repeating, it will inevitably lead to Shirley's defeat. This cunning dragon is looking to bring about such a scenario.

“Furthermore, I have seen through your trick! The swords that appear in your hands are naught but a product of imaginative alchemy, are they not?”

From his ancient knowledge, he had figured out the secret behind her technique that not even the adventurers back at the guild could understand fully.

Alchemy allows one to make a copy of an existing object, a secretive art that can make something from nothing. The imaginative alchemy that she employs allows her to disintegrate any sword that she held, and then reproduce copies with magic.

Since it's a copy created using magic, if it leaves her hand it will disappear after a short while. Moreover, since the technique only works on swords that originally had no magical power imbued into them, the usefulness of it relies solely on the skill of the swordsman wielding it, so it isn't a thing a lot of people would use.

As if intending to demonstrate, the rapier she had thrust into the dragon's wings and the giant sword she had used to ascend into the sky had both faded away.

“Thou doth not possess any physical weapon, only using such a trinket to pull weapons from a magical spa-”

“You've been going on and on for a little while now.”

For one who prides themselves on their knowledge, they seek to understand the enemy's techniques and skills, so that they can know their next move.

And indeed, along with the threat of the endless well of magical power and regeneration, having her opponent unveil the nature of her magic is a definite disadvantage.

But still, Shirley doesn't show an ounce of fear, as she cut through the windpipe of the dragon and ended his monologue a fourth time.

“Amongst adventurers, it's considered bad luck to spend time talking about your opponent's ability... ‘Death flag’, is the term they use. Did you know that?”

With all her might, she began slashing all over the dragon's body apart from that head protected by a magic barrier.

For the sake of just one moment. Cut the body until it can no longer move. Thanks to

the dragon attempting to start up a speech every time he healed instead of pressing an attack, Shirley finally saw exactly where she needed to cut.

“...There!”

For the first time in the battle, she finally had an air of intensity. Curved sword in hand, she sliced through a section of the dragon’s belly that had gone untouched before now, and as the dragon began to regenerate fully... The body of the ancient dragon that had always relied on its boundless magical energy felt an unfamiliar sense of fatigue.

“YOOOOOOOU...! WHAT DID YOU DOOOO!!!???”

“I’m sure you know exactly what I did.”

In that usual brusque tone, the Demonic White Sword spoke as if she hadn’t done anything special.

“The inexhaustible magical energy that you were drawing from the earth... I severed your connection to it. That’s all.”

The ancient dragon had not noticed since it had not landed a single blow on Shirley, but she herself was also a semi-immortal.

And he did not notice the power that dwelled in those deep eyes. From the day she had escaped from imprisonment and the torture ordered by the man she loved the most, those eyes saw all.

Things that move at a speed unseen.

Things that lie unseen behind barriers or shields.

Concepts and curses, the ethereal and the corporeal, ‘power’...

Even what lies a few seconds into the future.

However, those eyes can merely see, they cannot affect anything on their own. That is the nature of that woman’s power.

“U-unthinkable! To sever a power that doesn’t have a physical form with mere swordplay, that shouldn’t be possible...!”

"Physical form or not, it doesn't change the fact that it was still there. So, I decided to destroy it... That's all there is to it."

For once, the ancient dragon is speechless, unable to find the words to respond.

She can see everything. That exceptional ability the dragon had was no exception. So long as she can see it, it exists.

And if it exists, she can cut it. Even if it is a 'power' with no physical form, anything she sees can be cut. A sword that exists outside of the laws of nature, Shirley's name as the Demonic White Sword comes from the fact that everything is vulnerable before her blade.

"Well then... With that, I shouldn't have to listen to you boasting about your power anymore. All that remains is to finish you off."

As she thrust the tip of her blade towards it, the ancient dragon saw the shadow of a god of war.

A little time ago.

"The chieftain?"

Kyle tilted his head in confusion at Asterios, as they stood in front of the burning pile of bad bonobos.

"Yes. With a group as large as this, there should have been an older individual monster that would act as a leader known as a 'Silver Bag', did none of you three see it? It would have been larger than the rest, and be covered with white body hair."

Just like the goblin queen, any sufficiently large group will eventually have a leader figure, so if there wasn't a leader for a group of this size it would be very abnormal.

For some reason, he had a bad feeling. After rubbing his chin with a groan, Asterios retrieved a crystal ball and a stone eye with wings from his baggage.

"What are those?"

"It's a magic tool used for clairvoyance, it's meant to be used for reconnaissance but I brought it so that we could watch Shirley's fight on the peak. With this, we can see what's going on atop the mountain."

Once released, the stone eye flew towards the mountain without a sound. And after Asterios cast a short chant, the scene from the point of view of the eye was projected on the crystal ball.

"Woah! That's really convenient!"

Speaking as a scout, Cudd exclaims in approval. An image is displayed from an angle and height no normal human could ever see from, and looking down on that summit the picture they saw displayed looked like a battle from a legend.



“...Amazing.”

That's the only word that fits.

A contemporary swordswoman overpowering an ancient dragon. In terms of technique and skill, none of them can truly grasp her movement.

Kyle gazes at the crystal with envy. His aspiration to reach the same heights as her is not borne of a simple crush. He too wants to be an adventurer that can one day square off against a dragon in such a way.

“Hm? Wait... Look at that!”

Leia pointed at the crystal ball. At the edge of this battle for the ages, a white-haired bonobo was looking on, the Silver Bag.

“I've got a bad feeling about this... I don't understand the reason why, but it seemed to have escaped the influence of my magic.”

“Asterios-san, is there some kind of way this magic tool can convey a message to the other side?”

Asterios shook his head silently.

He doesn't know what the chieftain bonobo is thinking or why it's there. But, all the bad bonobos in this mine are under the rule of that dragon.

If it plans on interfering in the battle between its master and a foreign enemy, it's hard to imagine a positive outcome.

He desperately wants to warn her, but by the time he made it up there it would probably be too late, and unlike Asterios if he made it there he would only be a burden.

Kyle mulled it over in his head, then eventually lifted his head and spoke whilst looking into Asterios' eyes.

“Asterios-san, I might have a way to let this magical tool transmit my voice, is it alright if I try and tinker with it?”

“No, I don't mind, but... Is it possible for you? It's a difficult thing to modify a magic

tool that someone else has made."

"I studied magical tools during my education. I can't say for certain I can do it..."

He remembers his first request. And the remorse that will never fade away.

"But, I don't want to live with regret because I decided to do nothing."

It was then that Shirley unleashed a new flurry of blows.

A storm of steel that would end the life of any normal monster caught within it, the dragon desperately attempts to protect its head.

At first, it tried to intercept Shirley with fire and fang, but in the face of the onslaught eventually, all he could do is shrink further and further back.

Its inexhaustible supply of magical energy has been cut off, and now its body is beginning to grow fatigued from having to regenerate the copious amount of wounds.

It was utter humiliation. The proud ancient dragon that was being pushed into a corner by this little human glared at Shirley who was barely visible because of her speed and chuckled to itself in its heart.

(But, this is all there is to your power...! With a single blow, I shall put a halt to you...!)

The ancient dragon was as cunning as a snake. Being adept in the field of mind manipulation magic, he had shielded the Silver Bag from such spells and had him lurk in the rocks to wait for an opportunity.

(It is unheard of humiliation to have to borrow the power of a lesser being... But better to suffer that than meet my end...!)

Although it would need some time to verbally cast it, the chieftain can cast the intermediate magic called <Burn Wall>.

It is a wall of flame that would span the entire nest. Even with that inhuman speed and swordsmanship, it's hard to imagine that she could take a blow from such a magic and survive unscathed.

The ancient dragon isn't yet senile enough to miss this chance. If he chewed her into

pieces, her body and mind would both be ground to mush.

(Yes, continue to focus upon me. I will soon destroy you utterly....!)

At the very moment before the Silver Bag was about to finish casting the fire magic...

“Shirley-san, behind you! The Silver Bag!”

The voice of a young man flooded the field of battle. Turning their eyes upwards, they saw that the source of the voice was a flying stone eye that was looking at Shirley from above.

“Tch!”

Shirley jumps in the sky, using the dragon as a springboard. And, twisting in the air like a crescent moon, she threw one of her swords through the skull of the hiding Silver Bag.

The surprise attack that the dragon had thrown away all his pride in order to gamble on had been completely foiled.

“Y-YOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOU!!”

His eyes flashing in anger, he opened his mouth to spit flame once more. But, unintimidated, Shirley cut through another of the dragon's tendons and sent it tumbling back onto the ground.

The regeneration that had been going on constantly before now didn't occur, and the blood continued to leak out of that exhausted body.

The dragon that had received dozens of fatal wounds had finally run dry of magical power.

“T-this can't be....! I-I am the Western...”

“I don't care.”

Shirley cuts through the dragon's neck. With that, the consciousness of the livid and humiliated dragon with a love of vain monologues fell into darkness.

After that, Shirley eventually descended from the mountain and greeted the party with a pickaxe resting on her shoulder, prompting a suspicious look from Cudd.

“What’s with the pickaxe?”

“There was something I wanted to mine. So, I took my favourite pickaxe.”

“What about the dragon’s treasure hoard?”

“Well, you all contributed to the request by killing the dragon’s minions, so you should take as much as you like.”

Seriously!? Although, Shirley poured cold water on Cudd’s dreams of an early retirement immediately after.

“That said, you can only take as much as we can store in the wagon.”

“...Don’t ruin it as soon as you say it.”

As Cudd started heading towards the mountain with a complicated expression on his face, Shirley approached Kyle.

“You’re the one who told me about the Silver Bag at that time, right? I just wanted to say thank you.”

“N-no! Shirley-san, you would have managed on your own anyway, I just did something unnecessary...”

“Well, you might be right.”

But, even as she said that Shirley went on.

“There is no such thing as certainty in battle. No matter if you’re an expert or a great hero, there are times when you’ll run into trouble. So, I don’t think what you did was for nothing.”

Shirley placed her right hand on her chest and said so with a smile small enough you might think it was an illusion.

“So, thank you. Thanks to you, I survived.”

“N-no... It really wasn’t anything big like that...”

He scratched the back of his head in embarrassment. As his hands trembled and his mind raced, Kyle eventually sped off in the direction of Cudd who was making his way towards the treasure that awaited him.

“I-I’m going also hunting treasure, so me wait for!”

As Kyle ran off shouting with very garbled grammar, Shirley tilted her head.

“...What was that?”

“...Huh. Shirley-san is a little slow.”

“Slow? What do you mean? Was there something wrong with my movement?”

“No, what I meant was... Well, maybe it’s better if you don’t know.”

Leia stretched her back and looked towards the mountain full of treasure.

“Right-o. I guess it’s time to go look for that gem, huh~?”

“...The battle in the nest got quite violent, so the gems got scattered around a lot, are you going to be okay looking?”

“Don’t worry. I’ll use search magic to locate it.”

She said that, but Leia didn’t move from the spot. What to say... Ah... Scratching her head, she finally found the words.

“I just wanted to say, thanks. For putting up with my selfishness.”

“You don’t need to thank me in particular. It was just coincidence that our paths and goals crossed... Your request just happened to get done along the way.”

“Even so, driving the wagon and defeating a dragon, there’s no way I could have done those things on my own. Without you, I never would have gotten my family treasure back.”

Leia looked up at Shirley with her brighten golden eyes that shone like the sun.

“So, thank you very much! Shirley-san, I’m so glad I met you!”

“...”

After saying that, Leia rushed after the two boys. As soon as she caught up she began fighting with Cudd, and Kyle somehow managed to take elbows to both the face and the gut when he tried to break it up. Looking at such a peaceful scene in silence, it was hard for Shirley to imagine that she was fighting a life or death struggle not long ago.

“Is something wrong, Shirley-sama?”

“No, it just feels somewhat fresh.”

“Ho? The veteran who has been adventuring for over ten years still finds something fresh?”

“Until now, I only ever did requests to earn money for my daughters, I never really cared about the circumstances and feelings of the client. So, that’s the first time I had ever been thanked face to face for it.”

“Well, well.”

Asterios laughed pleasantly.

Chapter 15

Mother and Daughters' Day Off (1)

According to legend, a hero has access to an unlimited number of tools and can draw on them as if pulling them from thin air.

The source of this story is a magical tool which is called 'The Hero's Toolbox'. Although it might look like a treasure chest at first glance, opening the lid would reveal that its many times larger than the outside would suggest, the inside being a magical space where the owner can use a magic tool to retrieve items from the box no matter how far away they are.

This is the basis of the alchemy Shirley uses in battle. It is the essential storehouse for the original articles, and since it's easily accessible from anywhere, it has incredible synergy with the imagination alchemy.

"Alright, there."

Naturally, she keeps things other than weapons in the toolbox.

Aside from the various tools she sometimes uses whilst adventuring, there are also the gemstones she excavated the other day at Jewelsaad Mine. A sapphire for Sophie, and a ruby for Tio, matching the colour of their eyes.

And, inside that spacious treasure chest, a desk, a chair, and a lamp had been set up, along with a diary that just had another page written in it... A growth record of her daughters, Shirley's modest hobby.

"The result of the other day's test... Sophie, 100 points. Tio, 68 points?... You really worked hard, huh?"

As she recalled the results of the test her daughters took when she was questing, Shirley could feel the corners of her mouth loosening by themselves.

Putting aside Sophie who consistently gets high grades, it might seem strange that a parent is so happy about her daughter barely achieving a passing mark, but Shirley

knows just how much effort that grade represents for her daughter who struggles with studying.

Of course, her grades had never been high. If she got better at her studies, obviously it would make her happy.

But, it isn't just for the sake of studying. The most important thing is that they have a lot of choice in their futures. And learn to strive for the things they want in life.

She doesn't know what paths her daughters will walk in their lives, but she sincerely hopes that these youthful days will help open up many doors for them.

"...It's about time to go."

Putting her pocket watch that she had left open on the desk away, she put the growth record back on the shelf and headed up the ladder that she had propped up against the wall of the magical space.

Lightly pushing a nondescript piece of the ceiling aside, it opened up and light began to shine into the dimly lit space below.

As she climbed up the ladder, she emerged in her familiar rented room. Shirley's arranged furniture was organized around the room in the Deficit House.

After climbing out of the magic tool known as "The Hero's Toolbox", Shirley covered it up with the cloth once more and changed out of her work clothes into a pretty one-piece dress.

"Are you two both ready?"

"Yep!"

"We're ready to go."

In contrast to Shirley's dress where the hem reached all the way down to her ankles, Sophie and Tio emerged from their shared bedroom wearing knee-length skirts that gave their legs more breathing room.

Even if Shirley is fiercely opposed to her daughters wearing anything that exposes them above the knee, she can't deny that the current fashion in town is geared towards

risqué clothing.

It has been ten years since she arrived in this town. As a noblewoman who never wore exposing clothes, it was hard for her to believe what she was seeing when she arrived. Many female adventurers valued mobility over modesty, and wore armour that exposed the thighs and abdomen, she even saw one woman wearing 'bikini armour' that was little more than plated underwear.

Even if it's unthinkable to let them expose their skin like that... She doesn't want people to make fun of her beloved daughters for looking unfashionable either...

"Mama, what's wrong?"

"...No, it's nothing."

My daughters look good no matter what they wear!

In her internal struggle between the ideals of a chaste noblewoman and fashionable young girls, Shirley comes to a conclusion that only a doting mother could.

"Anyways, are you sure you want to come along with me?"

"Mm. It's for homework."

"An assignment about a family member's job... Well, certainly I'm the only one that qualifies, but since adventurers are pretty free it's not really going to seem like real work."

Shirley plans to go around the city to prepare for her next adventure, and Sophie and Tio want to accompany her, notebooks and pens in hand.

They seem to have been given an assignment as homework. It seems like the perfect assignment to test student's ability to watch and learn, as well as expressing what they saw through writing, but of course, for Shirley's job, such an assignment could have been a problem.

"...Well, it should be fine. I'm not planning on going out of town today."

A quick round of errands to the blacksmith and the tool shop, then dropping by the Adventurer's Guild. The only point of danger is the blacksmith because there are

plenty of blades about, but so long as she watches over the two of them carefully they should be fine even if they swung one around.

"Then, let's go. This is for work, so make sure you don't bother the other adults, okay?"

"Ye~s!"

"Mm."

Her daughters nodded cheerfully. And, in that way, the mother and her two daughters began their family day out.

An ordinary man wouldn't have even seen the sword move.

After the log on the stump fell apart into six equal parts after being sliced by the flamberge, Sophie and Tio, both wearing gloves, worked together to bring a new log from the woodshed to also make into firewood.

Because of recent developments in magical technology, the revolution of automation has even reached this remote town. Even in the Deficit House; bathing, toilet, and kitchen appliances had greatly enhanced the day to day lives of the adventurers who stayed there.

Meanwhile, the craftsmanship of the dwarves is still focused on traditional manual labour. Their technical skill isn't limited by the capabilities of machines, and skills they've acquired such as knowing the perfect temperatures of the kiln and just how much force to apply to hammer blows is something that could never be imitated by automated magic tools.

"Dimros-san, we're finished with the woodcutting."

"A'ight."

The master of the forge responded bluntly.

A distinctly familiar face had come to talk about the sword she had purchased some days ago, but when the aging dwarf saw the two young girls she had brought with her, he was somewhat confused until the circumstances were explained to him, so he

proposed using the sword to chop firewood to kill two birds with one stone.

To be honest, it was hard for him to get a good impression of the sword's strength simply from chopping wood, but it seemed like the daughters were delighted watching their mother's skills.

"Mama, that was amazing! Like, you were just holding the sword, then suddenly the log went paka~n!"

"Mm...! How did you do it? I don't know?"

Even though Sophie and Tio were excited, they soon left to explore the shop so that they didn't interrupt the adult's conversation, looking at all the weapons and even trying to play with them.

Never letting those two out of her sight, and conversing with Dimros close enough to them that she could react before anything could possibly happen, she turned one eye towards the flamberge and muttered

"This isn't suitable for slashing things at all. Didn't you say that this weapon specialized in gouging flesh?"

"You woulda hardly guessed that by the way you were slicing up them logs, but it's true. What I meant is that is strength lies in ta' causing untreatable wounds, you're not going to see that in effect against a lump o' wood."

This exceptional weapon isn't suitable for tearing through armour or a creature's hard exterior, nor can it showcase its ability to 'cause untreatable wounds' against the undead.

In other words, it would be deadly effective against monsters that don't fulfill those conditions. Especially if you consider the fact that prolonged battles against large monsters could take place over a span of days, and many of those monsters employ healing magic.

The value of being able to inflict an unhealable wound on such a monster can't be understated. An untreated wound will be left to fester if unhealed, and eventually, a monster could succumb to necrosis or tetanus.

She understood well enough. Planning on using it in battle next time, the flamberge in

Shirley's hand disappears as she uses the imagination alchemy, causing Dimros to glare and angrily sigh.

"Gah! Stop playin' aroun' with magic and use the damn thing! The sword I put so much effort in 'ta is gonna cry, ya know!?"

"It costs too much money to do maintenance on weapons after every battle. I need that money to take care of my daughters."

Before, Dimros sometimes had his doubts about selling to Shirley even though she was a master swordswoman, and this was exactly the reason.

Is there a single blacksmith in the world who would be happy knowing that a piece of craftsmanship he was proud of lay discarded somewhere, whilst some fake copy was the one getting all the use?

"Ya know, you should buy one or two magic swords, my shop may not look it but I could definitely getcha some. If you're worried about them becoming dull, don't be, they won't lose sharpness no matter how many nasties ya cut through."

"I don't care about buying expensive weapons, even if it means I'm sacrificing quality, I'd rather have different kinds of swords available for every possible situation instead."

Known as magic ore, weapons crafted from this rare metal carry magical properties and can be enchanted further to add lasting effects... Magical weapons are essential for any self-respecting veteran adventurer.

A spear that can freeze an opponent in place, or a blade that will burn through flesh as it runs a monster through. Even axes that cause storms and hammers that conduct lightning, whilst there are many popular magical weapons out there by far the most sought after are blades which do not lose their sharpness, a weapon with an enchantment that prevents blunting.

Although most magical weapons are hideously expensive due to the costs in labour and materials, a sword that only has an enchantment on it to keep it sharp is relatively inexpensive.

With the magic tool "The Hero's Toolbox" at her disposal, it wouldn't be hard to carry around and utilize various kinds of magic weapons either.

But.

"It's impossible to have a similar variety of magical weapons to replace what I've got now, and what's more even if you say it doesn't lose sharpness in battle, a magical weapon still requires some maintenance, right? Like removing the hilt to clean."

"Goes without sayin'"

"That's why I'd rather use imagination alchemy. Even if it isn't quite as good as a magical sword, so long as I have enough magical power I can produce as many as I need without worrying about them going dull, and what's more, I can throw them without worrying."

Shirley keeps going on.

"Since I'm using disposable swords created from magic, I can spend less time cleaning and more time with my daughters."

Dimros sighed even louder than last time. Even if he's a proud and somewhat obstinate craftsman, he can't measure up to the stubborn woman in front of him.

"Oooh... Cool..."

"Wait, Tio!? Why are you shaking it around like that!?"

Even if her mother is like that, at least one of those daughters are interested in a magical weapon.

As Sophie ran away from Tio, whose eyes were lit up as she played with a double handed sword that ran with electricity, Shirley instantly confiscated it and returned it to its sheath.

"Stop that at once. If you use a heavy weapon that doesn't match your body type, you're going to injure yourself. If you really want to swing something around, use a lighter weapon."

""Yeeeees.""

Even so, she had been drawn to such a strong magical weapon... Especially going straight for a heavyweight weapon like a two-handed sword, he was rather charmed

as a craftsman.

And with that child having a parent like that, Dimros felt a strange sense of security.

"Well, getting back on topic... Even if I don't plan on getting a magical weapon, I'm not strictly against using one. Including that 'love sword', you still have all those magical weapons I entrusted to you, right?"

"Obviously. How could I leave such lovely weapons in the hands of an amateur?"

Having found all sorts of magical weapons during explorations of ruins and dungeons, she has handled swords that she hasn't used for her alchemy.

However, it's rare to see her using a sword with a magical enhancement. An adventurer who took down an ancient dragon that would typically take an S-ranked party to defeat using nothing but unenchanted weapons, she isn't going to show her cards so readily.

The intelligent beast does not use their full power to hunt mere rabbits. Adventurers as a whole are always concerned with the manufacture and secrecy of their trump cards.

"So at the very least, can you use the swords I maintain for 'ya!? Or am I gonna have to ban 'ya from coming 'ere at all!?"

"Mu... That's a problem."

Dimros prides himself as a craftsman over being a merchant. It's natural that he wants the swords he pours his heart and soul into to be used by a skilled warrior instead of collecting dust.

"If you really want me to do so, please smith a magic sword that I can use frequently as a compromise. Then I'll buy it, and also bring it here to be taken care of."

"It's a deal. I'll hammer out a sword ya can't help but use."

The blacksmith's passion is on fire. After having said this much, he can't back down now. He will hammer out a sword even the Demonic White Blade can't help but use, no matter how many attempts it takes.

“Oh... It’s on fire.”

“Uwaaaah!? The sword is on fire!? Tio, stop iiiit!”

“Goodness, these children.”

That being said, he might also have to make a special testing area for magical weapons.

Dimros inscribed both of these tasks in his mind as urgent priorities.

Chapter 16

Mother and Daughters' Day Off (2)

The eyes of the Adventurer Guild's patrons widened when they saw the mother and her two daughters walk through the door.

The only adventurers whose eyes weren't bulging were the ones who also stayed at the Deficit House. Everyone else turned their heads and stretched their necks to get a look at the similar-looking family with their distinctive snow white hair.

“Oi, did that Sword Demon have younger sisters?”

“No, I've heard about this, those are apparently her daughters.”

“They look so similar... Anyways, appearance aside, isn't she way too young to have daughters that age?”

At first glance, the family looks like a group of sisters, and the adventurers gaze at them as they made their way to the request board.

Unlike Shirley who seems completely unfazed, Sophie and Tio aren't used to this and seem a little fidgety getting so much attention.

“They're still staring...”

“Uu... This is my first time in the guild, are kids not allowed in here...?”

That's not actually true, they had been in the guild many times back when they were infants, but right now those two girls were feeling a touch overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of the guild that was very different to that of the Deficit House.

But, those two are secretly aspiring adventurers. They do their best to ignore the eyes on them and put on a brave face.

“Mum, what's this?”

“The request board... It’s a bulletin board that details all the requests submitted to the guild, today I’m hoping to find a good quest to do tomorrow.”

When adventurers receive a request, they don’t necessarily have to immediately go out into the field to complete it. Depending on the circumstances, it might require some preparation in advance, so it’s quite common to accept requests several days in advance of starting them.

The dragon-slaying expedition she embarked on the other day is more an exception than a rule. Even putting aside the bad bonobos, Shirley is the only person in this remote town who would consider adventuring to a dragon’s lair with so little preparation.

“Hm... There are lots of requests. Um... Hunting smiles and anni... annihilating bandits?” And collecting feathers from a rainbow coloured bird.”

“Mm. Sophie, look.”

As she was looking at one of the requests at the edge of the board so as not to get in the way of the other adventurers, Tio pointed out a request to gather herbs which are often taken by rookies.

“I wonder if we can do this?”

“You’re right. It’s just going out to pick some plants...”

“It’s not as easy as that.”

Shirley gives the two a light smack over the head.

“The reason adventurers are asked to do this is that it is dangerous. Herb gathering outside the city... You have no idea what kind of monsters you might encounter. I don’t want the two of you imitating me, am I clear?”

“D-don’t worry! Mama, you’re such a worrywart!”

“...I’m not going to do something dangerous like that.”

They’re lying. In fact, they’ve been wanting to imitate her for quite some time. Even if she says that the outside world is filled with dangerous monsters, they won’t lose

heart.

Those rude adventurers suddenly stopped gossiping out of fear of the Demonic White Sword, who seemed to be exuding a slightly menacing aura, although that adventuring mother took a request from the board as if nothing had happened.

“Mama, what’s that request for?”

“It seems that a bear is snooping around a nearby farm, so I’ll get rid of it tomorrow.”

She only chose the request because she can complete it in a single day. Truth be told, the bear is actually a horned monster known as a Demon Bear, but that makes little difference to Shirley.

Thinking that she’ll be able to blitz the quest if she borrows the riding dragon Rangitz from the guild, she brings the request form to Yumina at reception, who is glaring at her for some reason.

“Exterminating the Monster at the Farm... You’ll be doing this tomorrow, I take it?”

“Is there a problem?”

“Not particularly. I don’t want to be stingy about which adventurers get which requests. But, you know, there’s a request with a much higher reward than this available.”

Yumina leans towards Shirley, and whispers in her ear.

“It’s actually a calamity class request... An Arch Demon has appeared in the Kingdom.”

“Okay.”

“...An S-Ranked party was already dispatched, but they’ve run into serious trouble.”

“I see.”

“...So, I was wanting to ask Shirley-san if perhaps she would go to temporarily join the party to support them in defeating the...”

“I refuse.”

The reply contained no malice, but also absolutely zero interest.

"I'm sure that party will eventually defeat it, and I promised to help out with my daughters' homework today."

"...Yes, but... I think this might be a little more important than spending time with your daughters..."

The receptionist gulped and looked down, Sophie and Tio don't really understand what's going on but even they feel pity for her.

Yumina knew that Shirley doted heavily on her daughters, but she believes that other things should be a higher priority for her.

"...Ah. Don't you two want to see Shirley-san do something really amazing?"

"Can you stop trying to get my daughters on your side?"

Yumina clicked her tongue in frustration. Apparently, the pressure on her from the higher ups in the guild is still intense.

"Well, maybe it would be a good opportunity for you to party up again?"

"I already fulfilled that obligation."

Without even a vague verbal agreement to provide a glimmer of hope of appeasing middle management, Yumina sighed heavily as she accepted she was fated for another tongue lashing.

Curious as they were, there's no way the twins weren't going to be drawn to the sound of wooden and steel swords clashing.

On the guild premises, there is a basic training square. Although a dedicated facility will be built sometime next year, for now, the square is filled with training adventurers, from the freshest of rookies to veterans in between requests.

"Hah!"

“Uwaaa!?”

“What!? Are you seriously trying to cut us up!?”

As Shirley went to take a peek with her daughters, she noticed Asterios leading a rookie party in training.

The Minotaur isn't going easy on them... Making swings and slashes left and right at Kyle and Cudd, the two of them are twisting and turning this way and that in a desperate attempt to dodge his attacks.

“A-are they going to be okay!? He's attacking with a big axe!?”

“There's no problem. They aren't going to get killed.”

“...I'm not sure...”

From Shirley's point of view, the swings aren't fast enough to be killing blows, they are measured attacks... But to an untrained eye, it would seem like he was seriously trying to kill the two of them.

Even if it wasn't truly a life or death situation, this kind of training would help prepare the two of them for when they did face one.

It's hard to say whether or not this training will really keep them alive, but if they gain anything from it then it's not wasted effort.

“There. Your footwork is wrong.”

“Guah!?”

Being far too slow on his feet for a scout, Cudd tumbles to the ground after having his legs swept out from under him, and as he rolls the belt holding his trousers up comes loose and they slip off.

“Hahaha! Oi, idiot! Stop flashing your panties at us! Ahahahaha!”

“Mum? I can't see anything?”

“W-what? What's going on?”

“You don’t need to see.”

Leia was crying with laughter as she pointed at Cudd. Shirley, meanwhile, covered Tio and Sophie’s eyes with her hands whilst also turning her eyes away from such an unsightly scene.

“Well well, Leia-dono, you seem to be quite free? Why not participate as well?”

“Eh!? No, I’m an archer, so I don’t need to train to fight in the vanguard?”

“Ha ha ha, what are you saying? Someone in the back has just as much reason to learn as someone who fights in the front, in battle the rearguard can become the vanguard in the blink of an eye.”

Leia’s screams were soon added to the cacophony of the training square. Tio watched the adventurers from A-rank veteran and the E-ranked rookies training together and murmured quietly.

“...I just realized, that Minotaur guy is amazing. Swinging his axe that fast, but stopping just before hitting them.”

“Eh? Really?”

As Sophie looked at her, she nodded in response.

She hasn’t had any training herself, but she can realize just how extraordinarily talented he must be to swing around a heavy weapon like an axe and not hurt the rookies.

Shirley can’t help but be proud of Tio, who managed to learn so much from watching in such a short span of time.

Although, deep down, she’s a little worried about how fast she took to understanding something as dangerous as combat.

“Oh? Well well, if it isn’t Shirley-sama?”

“...Hello.”

Asterios, who hasn’t even broken a sweat in contrast to his pupils who were doubled

over, noticed Shirley.

“Are these lovely girls your daughters?”

“Yes. You two, say hello.”

“N-nice to meet you! I’m Sophie!”

“...I’m Tio.”

Asterios knelt down to look at the two of them and nodded gently with a smile.

“My name is Asterios. Your mother and I adventured together previously... Though I have to say, you two really have grown.”

“Huh?”

“Um... Have we met somewhere before?”

“Yes. About ten years ago, when Shirley-sama first joined the guild...”

Even if they can’t remember meeting him, flowers seem to be blooming around this unlikely reunion. Although it is a very mismatched scene, with the incredibly muscular and tall Minotaur smiling at the two beautiful young girls.

“By the way, Shirley-sama. This is a good opportunity, so why don’t you participate in training? Those children are going to learn strange habits if they only train with me.”

She looks at Kyle, and his eyes bulge as he shakes his head vigorously.

“No, I...”

She wanted to say that she was spending time with her daughters, but the words didn’t come out.

She felt a gaze on her from below, and she looked down to see the excited faces beloved daughters with their eyes shining as if they were expecting something great.

Shirley sighed, telling herself that she had no choice, and two swords appeared in her hands as her answer to Asterios.

She realizes she should go easy on them since it's only training, but since she wants to look good in front of her daughters, she's going to try a little harder than she perhaps should.

After this, the screams of the rookie adventurers increased ten-fold, but that's a story that need not be told.

Peaceful days... Even though Shirley still took requests, for the most part, she lived quietly.

At the same time, Sophie and Tio were informed about an event that would change everything.

For the first time in three years of school, parents would finally be able to see their child's day at school first hand... A day where the children could hardly focus because of the tension... A gloomy event called Parent Visitation Day.

Chapter 17

Parent Visitation Day and the Golden Witch

Shirley found out about it as she was helping her daughters write their report, after returning from finishing the day's errands.

"Sophie, you misspelled that word."

"Eh? Ah, it's true."

"Tio, you wrote that sentence wrong. The one that says 'Mother went to the blacksmithers and used sword', read that back to yourself and rewrite it."

"...This is hard. Writing is so annoying."

It's not easy to understand a language that is constantly developing in an era of innovation. It's not just grammar, it's natural for a child going to school to have a hard time learning to read and write in general.

"I did it!"

Through using the dictionary and learning grammar tips from her mother, Sophie had finished her one-page report.

"...Yes, well done. It's up to your teacher to give you a grade, but so far as I can see there aren't any spelling or grammar mistakes."

"Yay!"

"Mm... I'm done as well."

After Sophie's report was finished being reviewed, Tio finally handed in her own.

"...There are no real mistakes through most of it. But why are you saying the rookie adventurers are zombies in the final part?"

“...? Is that wrong?”

Tio was genuinely confused. She thought back on Kyle and the others shuffling back home like zombies after finishing training, so it doesn't really seem like she made a mistake.

“Personally I think it's quite funny, but it might cause a misunderstanding that really couldn't be treated as a joke anymore, so please correct it.”

“Muu...”

Even though she wasn't happy about it, necromancy is strictly forbidden by law, so Tio obeyed.

...By the way, strange and funny sentences like this come up in the student's writing all the time, and the teachers back at school often have to take a break from grading reports because they're laughing too hard.

“Both of you worked really hard, didn't you? Since it's still only 3 o'clock, Martha shared some cookies with me, so help yourselves.”

“Wow! Thank you!”

As a girl with a sweet tooth, Sophie is delighted and shares the cookies in the paper bag with Tio.

Perfectly peaceful family quality time. Shirley watched her daughters enjoying the sweets, and was wondering what she could bake for them herself when Sophie took something from her school bag.

“Oh yeah, mama. I forgot to give this to you... Here.”

“?”

Sophie handed her a piece of paper. As she carefully unfolded it, the first line said ‘Parent Visitation Day Announcement’ in big bold letters.

“In five days time, there's an event where parents can come and visit during class. The teacher wanted parents to sign up beforehand.”

After the details, in a section of the paper indicated by a cutting line, there was a space for the parent or guardian to put their name and address.

"Visitation day... Once every three years... So, there are events like this in the Kingdom's schools?"

There weren't any events like this back in the Empire, and even if there had been, Shirley's parents who hated her would never have come.

For Shirley, unless she had a genuine reason, the school wasn't a place she could snoop around no matter how much she wanted to.

Children often bully one another for the most trivial of reasons. If she had tried to sneak into the school to keep an eye on her daughters, it might have caused bad rumours to float around about them.

This news was truly a blessing. It was as if she was finally being permitted to watch over her daughters at school, something she had been struggling to stop herself from doing for three years.

"But mum doesn't like those boys in class. What if they say something embarrassing?"

"I don't think they will, but even if everything else is the same as usual, it will be hard to focus with mama being there."

"So, are you going to go, mum?"

"Of course, I am going."

Throwing the paper in the air, it fluttered for but a brief moment before it was cut by a dagger that suddenly appeared in her hand.

On the permission slip that was sliced from the paper cleanly, Shirley had somehow already written her name and the address of the Deficit House in her beautiful handwriting.

(Since it has been decided, it is time to prepare.)

She had to choose clothes suitable for a parent, striking a balance between not being too plain and not being too flashy. Not only that, but she needed to get her hands on a

state of the art magical projector that could capture scenes of her daughters in class without making a flash.

The other adventurers wouldn't have been able to believe their eyes if they saw just how happy the Demonic White Sword looked as she planned for the event five days from now. At this heaven-sent opportunity to watch her daughters' day without causing them trouble, Shirley was truly thrilled.

But, as this was going on, no one in that remote town was aware.

Formed up in a column bristling with fangs and claws, that army flew against the wind.

An ordinary person would be stricken with fear if they heard the earth-shaking roars of those mighty monsters.

It wouldn't be an exaggeration to call it the direst crisis in the history of the Kingdom, a grand invasion mounted to take the head of a Dragon God.

The peaceful days that people thought would roll on undisturbed forever were about to be trampled.

Shirley received the bad news the day after she learned about Visitation Day.

A single piece of paper, this time handed to her by Yumina. It was written with a quill and ink, both luxury items.

"At 8 o'clock tonight, come to the guild's training square."

Under this short instruction were the crossed weapons that symbolized the adventurer's guild and an emblem with an image of a girl in front of the dawn.

Shirley knows of only one person who uses the latter symbol. She dabbled with the idea of just ignoring the message, but since that would only bring more trouble she reluctantly visited the guild that night.

"Shirley, hasn't it been too long~?"

The voice that echoed throughout that silent training ground, far removed from the hustle and bustle it saw during the day, was an old-fashioned tone of voice that had a feel of child-like mischievousness.



From a visible distortion in space, she emerged amongst a shower of golden magic, a beautiful girl that looked to be no older than ten.

Her rich blonde hair stretched down to her feet danced like golden threads in the breeze, and in that pale face that looked like it never saw the sun a pair of blood red eyes shone. Even though she wouldn't lose in terms of beauty even to Shirley's daughters, the truly eye-catching quality of the person in front of her were the two black horns on her head that distinguished her as a demon.

"Even having said that, our last rendezvous was naught but three months prior... Truly, when one grows old, does it not seem like the wheel of time spins ever more slowly, mm~?"

Nihi... The girl laughed and flashed her razor-sharp canines that were in contrast to the rest of her harmless looking body. Unlike Shirley, who had a pure sort of beauty, this fascinating younger girl had a charm that could be described as avaricious.

"I didn't come here to catch up. What do you want from me, Canary?"

Don't be misled by her youthful appearance. That woman is a monster who has been spoken about in legends the world over for more than a thousand years.

A semi-immortal of the already long-lived demon race, the person described as the mother of the guild and also its current head.

A financial genius and champion of the business world who holds sway over 30% of international capital, a symbol of chaos throughout the ages, the strongest sorcerer knowns as 'The Golden Witch'.

"Like always, still incapable of simply enjoying a conversation, hmm? So be it, once I tell thee why I've called you hence, you will have little choice but to move into action."

She suddenly seems disturbingly assertive, Shirley began to ready herself for whatever the news might be, but even she was appalled by what she heard next.

"And so... It seems like the visitation day thou looked forward to so eagerly is to be cancelled, hm~?"

"..."

Her thoughts froze.

She has known for Canary for more than ten years. Even if she tries to hide it from others, this person knows just how much of a silly doting parent Shirley is.

The fact that Canary is telling her about the cancellation personally is... Strange, but not impossible. She does serve on the school's board of directors, after all.

The real problem is... The visitation day, an opportunity for Shirley to admire her daughters in their everyday school lives without having to trespass on school grounds has been cancelled.

“...I’m sorry. I don’t understand at all? Can you at least tell me why?”

After being silent for a long time, the Demonic White Sword managed to choke out the words whilst she covered her face a hand.

“Have thou not heard of the cases where dragons are leading thrall swarms of intelligent monsters?”

“I have.”

“In truth, all of them were but scouts of dragon kings. I found out only a day prior that, alongside the Dragon King of the West, the kings of the South-East and North-West have attacked the royal capital at the head of their own armies. Frankly, it’s the worst calamity in the history of this Kingdom.”

A dragon king is the second highest ranked existence in their race, and in the eight different directions of the world there exist eight mighty dragon kings who each hold their own dominion.

Siegfried of the North.

Fafnir of the Northeast.

Susanoo of the East.

Vritra of the Southeast.

Georgios of the South.

Aži Dahāka of the Southwest.

Beowulf of the West.

Níðhöggr of the Northwest.

Collectively known as the Eight Dragon Kings. Each of these named dragons held strength that far eclipses those of the ancient dragons in the tier below them and their greatest quality is the ability to make subordinates of those prideful dragons below them.

It's an extremely troubling thought, a monster that can subjugate a dragon capable of destroying an entire army division. The strength of humans has always lay in cooperation and intelligence and using those they have culled both beast and monster to secure their livelihoods. It seems that monsters have begun to adapt, and now even the most powerful beasts will band together to attack.

This was the kind of menace that could set human society as a whole into a death spiral.

"Their aim is definitely the one who exists beneath the capital, Aion. Originally they were subservient to the dragon god, but since Aion himself is so snuggly, those three ruffians probably didn't feel like playing along anymore... Inevitably, they must have conspired to attack him, hm~?"

"...Countermeasures?"

"Naturally, we've already made moves Adventurers of A-rank and above from throughout the kingdom and from neighbouring countries have already been mobilized. However..."

Canary's voice trails off as she looks down.

"The Kingdom's elites intend to keep it all secret until the last possible moment. Since the armies are approaching from three different directions, any confusion would only serve to hamper the defense, no?"

Shirley understood the reasoning.

If a natural disaster more devastating in scale than any before it was suddenly

announced, any merchant worth his salt would pack up shop and move the very same day.

That's what it means to live. It's hard to blame those in the path of the dragon kings able to escape doing so, but if all the sellers of food and goods evacuate, the Kingdom will be thrown into chaos.

In light of just how much the anarchy alone would damage the kingdom, the judgment of the powers that be seems reasonable. Even though it may prove to be an unpopular decision once it becomes public, they will stand by it all the same.

"Well, if myself and the adventurers join hands, the people of the Kingdom shall not come to harm. I will cast dimensional magic that not even a dragon king can tear through."

The secret sorcery of the witch that transports entire areas to other dimensions, and prevents them from being physically interfered with by anything from the original dimension.

Certainly, it's a perfect protection, but that's what's so strange about it. If she was this confident in her technique, why did she go to the trouble of contacting Shirley personally?

"Well, even if I say the Kingdom... I have scant little time to protect all the scattered towns and villages dotting the countryside. If we've assumed the speed of the invasion right and the adventurers assigned to hold them off aren't defeated rapidly, after three days I will call for a general evacuation to be organized by B-rank adventurers to bring people into the range of my spell's protection."

"Did you just say... after three days...!?"

The class visit was in four days. Is she not being caused undue suffering by this dragon invasion?

"Moreover, we don't have enough people who can reliably fight against dragons. The Holy City to the northeast and the Trading City on the southeastern coast are going to be protected, but this remote town that is directly in the path of the dragon king of the west... It has been decided to evacuate it instead."

The calm part of her mind knows that there's no point in getting angry. But, that

calmness was soon blown away by a raging murderous intent, like an out of control fire or the most bitter of snowstorms.

"Beowulf of the West... Is that so... Those other two decided to go after the big fish, but this lizard decided to specifically interrupt my visitation day..."

"Well, something tells me that he didn't just come to disturb visiting day, you know."

"If that's the result, it's all the same to me."

The look on her face could belong to the cruellest of warriors. Taking her daughters and fleeing was not an option. Shirley knew all too well how bitter it was to be forced from your home to live in the wilds, and it was not something she ever wanted her girls to experience.

"So, since the hands of yours truly are a touch to busy to deal with the west right now, could I not trouble you to deal with it for me, mm~?"

"Yes. I won't let even a single one escape."

For that woman who intends to face down the dragon king and his army... Canary knows that there's a technique that could wipe them out completely.

But, Shirley wasn't considering the power of the dragon king at all. A dragon king alone would take a day to defeat... If it brought an army, that would extend to three days.

Even if she went out to battle right now, it's unlikely that she could make it back in time for class visitation. Ah, how could this happen... Why did the dragon king have to attack at such a crucial time?

"...I'll kill you."

Pure murderous intent leaked from her mouth. She won't be satisfied until this 'Dragon King of the West' is mutilated and cut up into the most unrecognizable of mincemeat.

"If I made arrangements to make attending visitation day possible, would that be to thy liking?"

At that time, the whispers of a demon snaked their way into Shirley's ears.

"If I worked hard, it may be possible for thou to defeat the dragon king and his flock in but one day, and attend the class event without fail. Is this not a wonderful suggestion?"

"...And what would I have to pay? What on earth are you plotting?"

As Canary beams at her with a smile that seems to only hold good intentions, Shirley bluntly demands to know her real aim.

In the first place, this witch's guiding principle is chaos, she has no interest in the welfare of the people.

Even if moving to help the Kingdom might not be strange considering her investments... Shirley can't help but shake the feeling that she's definitely planning something.

"What I seek in return if but a trifle. This one cannot move herself to subdue the dragons, so it only stands to reason to rely on those who can."

"I'll tell you right now, I have nothing with which to pay you back, you know that right?"

Shirley knows that Canary isn't lying about being able to make it happen.

The 'Golden' part of Canary's moniker isn't just for the colour of her hair. It comes from raw financial strength and the powerful connections that stem from that.

If she willed it, even if it meant risking death, she could bring even the most powerless of commoners to fight on a battlefield.

Canary possessed power in every sense of the word, all she had to do was give the word and the impossible became reality.

"I too am sorry that I cannot protect this town. Therefore, I have but one thing I wish to ask of thee. I wish for you to give me one night of your time... That is all."

"..."

Suspicious. This is all too suspicious. Though, if a person who didn't know better saw that girl, they'd think what she had on her face was a pure-hearted smile.

But, if there's one thing that is true about merchants is that the trustworthiness of their word is their most valuable asset, and the same is true for Canary.

And, as things stand, there's no way she would be able to attend class visitation day. Even so, she can't help but feel nervous about what exactly this night she would have to give up to Canary might entail.

Choosing between herself and choosing between witnessing the growth of her daughters, she made her decision in less than 10 seconds.

"I accept... your offer..."

She replied as if she were spitting blood. But, if she can participate in this event with her daughters, she will have no regrets.

With everything going according to plan, the infamous Golden Witch had a truly nefarious smile on her face.

Chapter 18

The Witch's Plot

As the army of intelligent monsters led by Martial and War Dragons soar through the sky and scurry along the earth whilst the King of the West moves towards the remote border town, Sophie and Tio thought of their mother who had already gone to intercept them.

“Mama... Is she going to be okay?”

“Mm... I’m sure she’s fine.”

It was three days until the Parent Visitation Day when Shirley had gently stroked their heads with a strangely apologetic look on her face.

“There’s a large group of monsters heading towards town. I have to intercept them or the town might not survive so I may miss the class visit.”

Without telling them what she was really facing, their mother had departed.

Even if the visitation day that Shirley had been looking forward to so much didn’t happen, Sophie and Tio wouldn’t have had any regrets. Because they knew it in their hearts.

Their mother was an adventurer. A person who is free, but still responds to cries for help. How could they, as daughters, ever regret having a mother who stands up and defends the people of the town in their time of need?

(But, for Mama to have to not go to the event she was really looking forward to, is it really serious?)

People naturally become uncomfortable when something that has never happened before occurs. Especially if it’s that mother who brought them up all by themselves.

“It’s okay.”

“Tio?”

It was the younger twin who spoke quietly to cut off the anxious silence.

“Mum is going to be okay. I think she might even finish quickly, and show up for the visit day to surprise us.”

Seeing her younger sister’s hands shaking on the windowsill, Sophie finally noticed.

Even though she’s putting on a brave face to try and make her older sister feel better, Tio is worried herself.

“...Yep, you’re right! Even if it might take her a little longer than usual, she’s still our mama!”

Sophie tries to lighten the mood as well with a cheerful answer. She shouldn’t be worried, her mother Shirley is the strongest there is.

Even if the two of them had never seen her fight before, they had heard all kinds of majestic tales from the adventurers about her exploits.

She fought with the grace of a flower. A woman who stood peerless on the battlefield and extinguished the lives of monsters wherever she went, the Demonic White Sword couldn’t be defeated so easily.

“So, should we go to bed now? If we stay up late and mama finds out later, she’ll be cross.”

“Who knows... That time may never come, hm~?”

“Huh-!?”

A voice echoed from behind the twins, a place that had been silent just moments ago. As they turned around with fright, they saw a beautiful blonde girl who seemed to be about their age, standing there with a bewitching smile.

“I am sorry to call at such a late hour, you daughters of Shirley. I have some small matter to discuss with thee.”

“Um...?”

“The guild master... Wasn’t her name... Canary?”

“The very same. I see I need not introduce myself.”

The two of them knew this ancient witch in the body of a young girl by appearance only. They had heard Martha and Shirley talking about her, and spied her once or twice visiting Shirley at the inn in the past.

“Um... What did you mean before? About that time not coming?”

“What’s this~? Do you truly not know?”

The Canary who had snuck up on the twins without them noticing at all... Now wore a sorrowful expression on her face.

“Do you not even know the nature of the quarry it is that she fights?”

“...What is it?”

Tio noticed that sweat had begun to drip down her arms, and form on the fists she had unwittingly clenched. The witch before her eyes almost seems like a harbinger of doom, a prophet who only tells of future calamity.

“The dragon that heads towards this town is no less than a King, at the head of ten vassal dragons and some hundreds more monsters besides. That Shirley, she went to fight that army all by herself, like a champion of yore...”

Sophie and Tio were lost for words.

They couldn’t have ever imagined the idea of their mother being killed. But, with the words from the guild master weighed on their young minds heavily.

“A dragon king... And an army of monsters... She’s fighting all alone!?”

“...”

The tales of the Dragon Kings have been handed down through legend. It’s not difficult to imagine what a hopeless situation fighting it alone would be, not even considering the army around it.

An image of their mother breathing her last on a bleak battlefield, on top of a mountain of corpses. As they considered this coming true, their eyes began to swim with tears at the despair of it all.

“Mama... Why would you...?”

“Why? Because it’s what she decided.”

Canary looked into the girls’ eyes and told them.

“She did it to protect the two of you. What other recourse did she have?”

“To protect us...?”

“All living things, not just humans, need a place to call home. Is it such a simple thing to abandon a life one has built? Not so. How can one believe in their own exceptional strength, if the beating of a dragon’s wings forces them to abscond with their children in hand?”

The girls remembered the apologetic look that their mother had on her face as she left that day. They thought it was about not being able to attend the class event, but was it really apologizing for the fact that she might not come back at all?

“For the sake of their child, no parent would regret losing their life. Such has been the way of mothers since time forgotten. For that person, she goes to that battlefield for the sake of your futures... My goodness, to run off and die without telling her daughters nary a thing, it leaves a rather poor taste in the mouth.”

You fool... Even if it seemed like those unkind words came from the bottom of her heart... There was a hint of sadness to Canary’s voice.

That reaction made Sophie and Tio realize just how much danger their mother had thrown themselves into, and they cursed their own powerlessness.

The two of them had wanted to become strong themselves one day to travel the world with their mother. So, when it came to this, to them their young age was irrelevant.

Why hadn’t they already become strong enough to help her? That sense of regret tore at them.

“I too wish to help her... But such things are already out of my hands. There is not much time left to lose. So, I offer the two of a choice.”

“C-choice?”

Canary proposed the suggestion to the two girls, with an enigmatic smile.

“How about it? You could ask the adventurers of the guild to help her, no? If they fight alongside Shirley, most of them might even survive to return home, hm~?”

“B-but, we don’t have any money...”

“And we can’t ask even more people to risk their lives...”

They wanted to save their mother. Although that’s what they truly want, they aren’t at an age where they can coldly weigh lives against their desires.

As if seeing into their hearts, Canary gently went on.

“Why, that’s nothing you should worry about. Any adventurer who accepts a request knows the risk they embark upon. I’ll provide the capital... And I’m sure there are plenty of adventurers who fancy themselves legendary dragon slayers, at least for the right amount of coin, mm~?”

Canary answered resolutely. Of course, they would not be foolish to work without pay, but what kind of adventurer doesn’t dream of also carving their name into legend?

All the more so if a woman they disliked was heading into battle to monopolize all that for herself. The adventurers of this town... There were certain to be quite a number of them who would feel that way, Canary knew.

“Of course, I have my own conditions. An adventurer is not a philanthropist, after all. For the act of providing funds, I should have to ask something of you in return... What shall you do? How much are you willing to go through to save your mother? It would be a hassle for me to lose an adventurer as competent as Shirley, you know~?”

She held out a small white hand. Their mother was in danger. Even if they have no idea what the conditions of the agreement are, they’ve already decided.

“Please...!”

“Please help mama...!”

Sophie and Tio took Canary’s hands and bowed deeply. Looking at the girls before her, The Golden Witch had a smile like a crescent moon.

A part of the guild no one from Deficit House had ever set foot in... Canary had teleported to her own room in this remote town’s branch.

She sat at her desk with her eyes closed as if lost in thought, then suddenly began cackling as she recalled it.

“Kukuku... Kahahahahahahaaaa! Child’s play! That was just too easy! Or rather, should I say that it was so trivial because of how amazing I am!?”

If Evil was ever looking for a Commander in Chief, they wouldn’t have to search any further if they saw her as she is right now. That childlike face was full of nefarious mirth.

“To fall so easily into my ploy for the sake of each other... That must be love. That truly must be love!”

For the sake of attending her daughters’ classroom visit, she accepted to help and even reluctantly agreed to owe the witch a favour, that mother who surpasses even a dragon king.

And fearing for their mothers’ safety in front of an army of monsters, they had agreed to the witch’s conditions, the two daughters of the Demonic White Sword.

It was an absurd situation no matter how you looked at it. Nevertheless, Canary didn’t care about such things as her mocking cackles rang around the room. The pleasure she felt from watching that doting mother and her daughters dance about in the palm of her hand was too much.

“So be it. So be it, then! The touching wishes of that sweet family, I shall grant them for a price!”

She will be busy from now on. The defense preparations, preparing enough money to pay the reinforcements and finding the right words to persuade them to risk their lives

in the first place.

There's no one who will simply throw away their lives for money without reason. Since ancient times, it hasn't just been money and contracts that moved adventurers, but the romance of the quest.

And, for the Golden Witch, it is easy to arrange for both. She will wring her prize out of that mother and her daughters without fail.

"First thing's first, I need to consider the reward. For now, the base compensation should be one hundred gold coins per head. After that, more should be promised for deeds of merit... Two gold coins for each peon? And for a dragon, a hundred gold coins? And for the King himself, five hundred."

Canary talked about such a ludicrous amount of money without batting an eyelid as she scribbled notes in her notebook.

"Hm. Fine work, if I do say so myself... Unfortunately, that bald branch chief is going to be busy. No matter what he says, it's not close to good enough. Trying to hide his shame with that toupee."

The closely guarded secret of the head of this branch was flippantly revealed, but luckily no one was around to hear it.

Incidentally, the branch chief is only trying to reduce the burden on himself by pressuring his employees to the point of stress to promote reluctant B-rank adventurers into A-ranks, since he himself is constantly getting caught up in Canary's whims.

"Now, it's almost time for things to progress. I'll soon get to witness Shirley's face twisting in humiliation! Kukukuku! AHAHAHAHAHA!!"

With a bang, a project plan that had been bound together with a large clip was slammed down on the desk.

Written in flashy black characters on the cover were the words 'Maid Cafe'.

Chapter 19

A Day in the Life of a Dragon King

Those strong and sturdy legs tore up the ground as they ran through the plains.

The riding dragon that runs along the ground and can be ridden by one person, it's the most common of all dragons raised by humans.

As Shirley dismounted, she used her incredible eyesight to see a large group of dragons flying on the horizon, though she watched them without a trace of fear.

It was an illuminated night, made bright by the light of the stars and the moon. That white hair of hers that looked like a flower in the grassland, it shone as if to rival those heavenly bodies.

“You lizards... I’ll make you regret ever coming here...”

That single flower bloomed into a battle-ready stance. Standing alone on this soon to be battlefield. She glowered at the dragons and their minions far in the distance with her red and blue eyes, how dare they interrupt the day she was planning to spend with her daughters?

The only thing she’s worried about is Canary’s upholding whatever her deal might be. She’s not concerned about a lack of reinforcements or magical support. But, even if she judges Canary as a despicable person, she can’t deny that she’s the kind of person who values promises and contracts.

The question is, just what sort of help was she going to get? No matter how strong of a witch she might be, it’s hard to imagine that she could also help out whilst at the same time preparing the dimensional barrier to save the citizens of the Kingdom.

(Maybe it’s reinforcements after all, but who would come?)

The adventurers over A-rank have all been assigned to protect different areas. As for the number of B-rank adventurers and below who would actually volunteer to come to join such a dangerous fight, the number would be extremely low.

Certainly, there will be some adventurers who go to battle if Canary got involved. But, for a battle like this, she's not confident Canary will be able to find anyone.

The way Canary moves people is through money. She appeals to those who are in debt, need money to keep themselves or a loved one alive, or just plain love gold.

But when it comes to money, those B-rank adventurers who value their own personal freedom won't move just for money, and C-rank adventurers would struggle with the subordinate monsters, not to mention a dragon.

And what's more, the entire idea of it is ridiculous, to go and fight on a battlefield that even the Demonic White Blade is going to have trouble with is no joke for those adventurers... You may as well be asking them to walk through the gates of hell themselves, who on earth would agree?

(If only there were reinforcements that could at least take on the small fry, it would save a lot of time... If anyone does show up... Well, not that anyone will."

To watch and laugh as she struggled alone... Maybe that would be enough of a motive for some people to come.

...No, Canary specifically said that she would make it so that she could get back for the Parent Visitation Day. She has to trust in her word, even if her everyday behaviour makes her think anything but.

"...They came?"

As she tries to stifle her anxiety, she catches a flow of magical power with her eyes.

With a strange sound, the air becomes torn and distorted. It's Canary's space warping magic. If she's using magic like this, it's most likely reinforcements, although you never know with her.

".....Eh?"

"What's with that face, you look like a pigeon who just got popped with a peashooter you know?"

From that tear in the fabric of space, a countless number of people with shining equipment began to emerge. To this, not even the normally cool Shirley can keep her

surprise off her face, prompting a strange figure of speech from one of the first men to come through.

She remembered that face, and the giant buster sword on his back. It was the B-rank adventurer who was giving Yumina a hard time before.

“...No, I... I’m just a little amazed. I thought she would send reinforcements, I just didn’t expect this many and such high quality...”

The adventurers that were beginning to lineup in front of Shirley constituted all the B-rank adventurers from the remote town where she lived, as well as all the C to E rank adventurers following behind. Among the group, she saw those three rookies she had partied with not long ago.

All of them had a passion in their eyes and looked ready to fight as they faced Shirley. But it’s too reckless, it was a fool’s courage. Almost bringing shame to their status as veterans.

“Why did you come? Did Canary threaten you all with something?”

If that’s the case, she told them it would be fine for them to go back.

“Ain’t got nothing to do with the guild. One hundred gold per head, two extra gold for bagging a monster, and another hundred for a dragon. Ain’t that just too good to pass up?”

The adventurers respond casually, saying that if there’s a reward an adventurer will always fight. They intend to stay.

It’s a somewhat unbelievable sight. That Canary didn’t threaten anyone, and instead actually offered a reward to stir up the adventurer’s spirits?

“Of course, that ain’t the only reward, ya’ know?”

“...?”

They grinned and laughed amongst themselves as Shirley looked confused, but she soon narrowed her eyes and asked them coolly.

“...You might die, you know?”

She addressed everyone with those straightforward words. B-rank adventurers are the only ones who should be fine. Although Shirley knows there are some adventurers with A to S-rank potential amongst them, the dragons are still incredibly fierce opponents.

So, what will become of the young adventurers in the back? There's no way they can stand up to a dragon. She didn't tell them, but she can't see this ending in any other way than them dying a dog's death.

Life should always come first. Even if they don't participate the town should be evacuated before the monsters arrive, and if they die then what's the point of a reward?

"You just don't get it, do ya?"

"?"

"Gettin' to fight dragons and all that, ain't it unfair if you're the only one doin' stuff like that?"

None of them had been forced or pressured to come along.

No one wants to die. That's obvious. But, if you give up on the opportunity to hunt such impressive game, then what point is there in calling yourself an adventurer?

"...I understand. If you're willing to go this far, I won't stop you."

With a sigh, Shirley gave up on trying to persuade them.

If they're all here just for the reward and glory, then Shirley doesn't have any reason to try and turn them back.

Even if they face mighty foes, and even if tragedies occur, these adventurers are responsible for themselves.

"Well, we had other reasons as well. We can't just let one swordswoman alone defend the whole town for us, right?"

A spear wielding man with a copper tag said, looking at the army on the horizon that looked like a haze of clouds.

Looking at the same sight, many of the adventurers gulped. There wasn't much time left before the battle, and there were even more monsters than they had expected.

"You don't have to tell us, we're already convinced. Hey, it exists right? The rumoured secret technique of the Demonic White Sword?"

The Dragon King of the West, Beowulf, is characterized by his frenzied strength, he had long since lost his capacity for speech and reason through his desire for physical power, and his crazed mind is now staring directly at an enemy that should be nothing more than prey.

For such an insignificant and worthless an opponent as a human to dare block his way. His target is that dragon who had brought low the entire race by throwing away his pride, the dragon god who chose to befriend humanity despite residing at the apex of existence.

Although Níðhöggr and Vritra planned to attack the capital at the same time in a three-way pincer attack, Beowulf did not care.

For him, this was the perfect opportunity to eradicate Aion and claim his place as a dragon god. No matter how crazy he might be, the Dragon King of the West wasn't going to miss this chance.

He would destroy any towns and villages on his path, and as the King who flew in front of an army intending to raise the capital under which their enemy sleeps looked into the distance, he saw a group of people.

Judging by their weapons and armour, they must be adventurers. Perhaps they are foolishly attempting to defend their town?

Even if some of them are skilled, what could their puny group of less than one hundred do against a foe both superior in numbers and ability?

As Beowulf sped up in anticipation of blowing right through this opposition, with his superior eyesight he spotted a woman with white hair at the front of the group.

"Wake up... <Blue Citadel of the Country Ig-Alima>, <Red Fortress of the Faith Sul-Sagana>."

As a result of hearing equally as sharp as his eyes, he heard the woman's chant as the two swords appeared in her hands.

Straight swords of blue and red, the same as their owner's eyes. On the blue blade is the pattern of the King of Beasts and on the red the King of Birds, even through his madness Beowulf is wary of this unknown magic.

"<The Mountain Breeze Shakes The Flowers of Hell • The Mourning Song Disappears on the Tide>"

A clear voice echoes and power begins to swirl around the woman. Both the people nearby her and the monsters in the sky felt a strong sea breeze that shouldn't be felt this far inland.

"<The Hand that Ravages Heaven and Earth • The Crimson Barrier Against the Waves>"

That voice echoed like a bell. Was it a song, a chant, or a lamentation? The blades in her hand gradually begin to grow brighter and brighter, dying the plains in colour like strokes of paint amidst the night.

"<Yet We Shall Cast that Hand Down • The Hand that Will Break on the Moment of our Prayers>"

Beowulf increased his speed. The Dragon King's instincts told him that no matter what, he could not let this magic be activated.

But, he was too late. Just as the giant beast had almost bore down to blow the woman away, the world was swallowed by pure light – and was changed completely.

"<The Hour of your End Draws Near • It is We Who Shall Bury You>."

It was as if myth itself had come to life.

When the spell's final verse was sung, he was dazzled by the extremely bright light that shone out. All sense of balance and direction had come undone and he floated in that space, as he opened his eyes to a scene where night and day had become one, and horizons stretched all around him.

The Dragon King, his generals, and all three hundred monsters under them had been transported to a chain of three island ruins suspended in the sky.

"Welcome to my world. As compensation for interrupting my class visit... I shall have you pay with your lives."

Beowulf turned to face the white-haired woman as they both stood alone, and bared his fangs at her.

In that land of floating ruins, the Sword Demon with blades of red and blue and the Mad Dragon King who had abandoned reason for power will decide victory or defeat.

Dragons are bastions of strength and magical power, flying unfettered through the sky with their massive bodies.

Putting aside that amongst the ten generals of the dragon king there were no ancient dragons, the adventurers who expected an immensely tough fight were shocked by the scene that betrayed their expectations.

At the very moment that the new world had been built and they were transported to it, the dragons that had been flying in the sky but a moment ago had been dragged down to the earth.

Perhaps if there was a water dragon amongst their number, it would have been dragged up from the sea as well. Even if they try to take to the sky again, it's as if they've been nailed to the ground, their claws can't impact the earth under their feet and their wings lack the power to get them airborne.

It is the absolute law of this alternate world. The treasured secret swords of the Demonic White Sword, Igarima and Shul Shagana. Although they possess several abilities, their most formidable is the world creation magic -<Garden City of the Tyrant>.

A magic that literally creates a temporary fabricated world, the ability to confine others in another world for a time is a strong enough ability on its own, but where it truly shines is the absolute law that it creates in that world.

As the name implies, it turns the caster into an absolute autocrat of their created realm, and in that arena, they can control the rules, not even spatial magic can be used to escape it should they decide it.

“I’d heard rumours, but really, that woman... To be a solo adventurer, but having such perfect weapons for large-scale warfare, what the hell!?”

It was the perfect battleground for the allied adventurers. The ruins gave the mages and archers perfect vantage points, as well as giving the thieves and assassins ideal places to hide.

The adventurers who are taking on the dragons are only B-rank, but with their movement being constrained by their inability to fly or destroy the terrain.

The adventurers knew that the biggest threat was still the dragons’ fiery breath, so they made sure to attack them from the sides and prevent them from turning around effectively.

This power was what Shirley had planned to use to fight the several hundred monsters converging on the town, all alone. It wasn’t only swordsmen who were taking the front line as well, many other types of close quarters fighters helped out. As the parties shift their vanguard to keep energy levels up, typically you would have to worry about the dragon flying overhead ignoring your frontline, but that’s not a worry in this parallel world.

They considered human beings insignificant. Although the dragons had supposed that it would be simple to crush these humans under their feet like ants, they had realized just how deadly a trap this was too late, and before they knew it were mired in a desperate fight for survival.

“Hey, I sort of imagined this being a bit more of a climactic battle.”

“What a coincidence, so did I.”

On the other hand, adventurers of C-rank and below on another island were squaring off against the subservient monsters such as goblins and bad bonobos that had accompanied the dragons, without letting their guard down.

Compared to the adventurers who seemed to be chatting so casually, those monsters were seeing visions of hell.

Transported into a different world and dropped into a huge crater on one of the islands, they were completely exposed to the arrows and magic of the adventurers above.

Been thrown so suddenly into such a desperate situation, even these monsters that have some semblance of intelligence would fall prey to their feral instincts and be reduced to mere beasts.

What's more, that crater soon became a fiery volcano after pots of oil were thrown in by the adventurers and ignited by fire magic.

All the melee fighters have to do is fell any monster lucky enough to escape the blaze. Just by defeating a single one of these weak monsters, they'd earn two gold coins. It really was terribly easy money.

Since they had begun fighting, it must have been at least twenty hours.

Whilst the other island battlefields were proceeding advantageously, the battle against the Dragon King raged on with streaks of lightning frequently raining down.

In addition to being able to control lower ranked dragons, controlling lightning is another key attribute of a Dragon King.

Although humans have developed magic based on the four elements of earth, fire, wind and water, they have not been able to cast lightning that can kill a man with one blow, like divine punishment handed down from above.

But, even though the secret to this magic remains unknown, there are many mages who assert it is definitely stronger than all the known elemental magic.

It is said that the speed of lightning is hundreds of times faster than the speed of sound. If it truly can reduce a person to ash with a single blow faster than the speed of sound, it could be terribly effective if twinned with earth attribute magic.

“GRAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHAH!!!!”

“Tch...!”

Lightning falls like rain, and Shirley barely managed to avoid taking a hit by blocking the strike with her blades.

Typically, something that travels at the speed of lightning shouldn't be able to be tracked by the human eye, but Shirley's ability lets her see where the lightning strike is going to hit a few seconds in advance.

Even something as fast as a bolt of lightning can't escape her sight. It is the basis of the Demonic White Sword's fighting style to combine the two, her magnificent swordsmanship and that inhuman ability.

It's that all-seeing ability that lets her corner opponents the way she does. If you looked at it on its own, it doesn't seem like the strongest ability in the world, but when paired with the swordswoman known as Shirley, they demonstrate their murderous ability.

"That's it...!"

"GWAAAAGH!?"



Blocking the thunderbolt had singed her skin and hair, but she still drove on.

Her white hair swirls in an arc like the hem of her dress as if forming a whirlwind, and Shirley breaks through the barrage of lightning to launch herself at Beowulf's right eye.

He struck at her with his talons, but using foresight she managed to dodge, and with both blades Shirley sliced the king from his jaw down through his torso.

"GAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH!!"

It screamed. But, it was not a roar of pain, but of anger.

From the beginning, this was a dragon king who had estranged himself from the other seven and abandoned his reason and logic. In exchange, it gained immense strength, and the ability to completely ignore the pain in pursuit of battle.

As his paw smashed into the ground, the entire island shook. Shirley used foresight to escape the blow, even if his talons had just grazed her it would have meant instant death.

Even though she was semi-immortal, she doesn't have enough magical energy left to completely regenerate the damage a single blow from a dragon king would do.

But, knowing that a single glancing blow is the difference between life and death is what is keeping Shirley's mind sharp.

(The burns from before are already healing... I need to pick up the pace... Hah!)

But, the Demonic White Sword launched into a counterattack straight away.

After dodging an attack the tremor of which would have completely bowled over any S-rank adventurer, she rushed the dragon and inflicted all manner of cuts and wounds to its body, slowly whittling away its energy.

"GUOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

Beowulf is being worn down even faster than she is. Shirley used the dragon's forearm as a springboard to launch herself into the air, and dodged the follow-up swipe by the other paw with a midair pirouette, driving straight towards the king's face.

“Fu...!”

Shirley breathed a short breath, and as she moved through the air she spun and sliced through Beowulf's right eye.

“GRAAAAAAAAAGH!?”

“Got it...!”

The Dragon King of the West had been robbed of his right-sided sight. Not missing the opportunity, the Demonic White Sword struck at his now exposed right flank.

The magic swords smashed through the scales that were a symbol of the dragon's strength and tore into the tendons with a sharpness that far exceeded the swords she could call on using her alchemy.

The giant monster tilted on its right side as it began to lose energy. Burning with indignation, the Dragon King of the West nonetheless knew the truth through his fog of madness.

This swordswoman has surpassed the power of a dragon king.

But, power does not always decide victory and defeat. Beowulf can still win if he lands a single blow, and he gambles on it.

Whilst shielding his vitals from Shirley's blows, the King unleashes magical power throughout his body.

Lightning rained down not just on their island, but the two others besides. With both instantaneous speed, high density and incredible killing power, he unleashed a final attack to destroy the swordswoman in front of him.

Shirley doesn't have the power to stop it. She is, in essence, a pure swordswoman, not some miraculous existence that can cancel out endless bolts of energy from the heavens with mere swords.

“Swallow the Wrath of Heaven, <Red Castle of the Temple>”

Yes, Shirley doesn't have the power herself to stop it.

The lightning that rained down was swallowed by the light coming from the blade known as Shul Shagana... The magic had activated as if words had appeared in the air, and the light emitted were wings on Shirley's back.

"Unfortunately, this is my arena. I can't accept self-indulgent things like attacks that saturate the earth, please do understand."

Shul Shagana's ability... To absorb magically created energy attacks, and disperse it harmlessly behind its owner's back.

These floating islands are her personal realm as a swordswoman, and that red blade is one of the keys to unlocking it.

In front of the Demonic White Sword, such unrefined magic is futile.

"Now... Let's finish this."

His final gamble had been completely negated, and the Demon Swordswoman rushed towards the neck of Beowulf who had completely exhausted himself.

The two swords slashed through his vertebrae and extinguished his life in an instant.

"To delay me for an entire day... As expected of a Dragon King. To force me into using Shul Shagana's ability as well..."

As she bid a parting compliment to her fallen foe, she staggered a little bit due to having so little practice using that sword's ability, but her face was still bright.

If reinforcements hadn't come, there's no way she would have been able to finish this fight in such a short time. All those supporting monsters... They would have been troublesome, as they're far deadlier as a horde than they are as individuals.

Even if she had gathered them on the same island, it would have been difficult. All those dragons would still be able to harass her from afar.

But, that's all just hypothetical. She didn't quite understand the details, but somehow Canary had inspired all the adventurers with sweet words and sweeter money to come to her aid.

Whilst not fully aware of just what awaited her back home, Shirley thought of the

visitation day event as she happily went to assist wrapping up the fights on the other islands.

Chapter 20

Epilogue

“So, do you have any last words?”

“Wai-!? Isn’t this going too far for a mere joke!?”

Her atmosphere as a bewitching and mysterious youth is crumbling.

Shirley was at an utter loss when her two daughters had embraced her tearfully when she got home, and as soon as she heard the full story made a beeline for the guild.

Canary, who tried to escape using teleportation magic, was tied up and hung upside down from a tree branch. Under her, there was a huge pot filled with boiling water that had been set up for her punishment.

“Hooooot!? Can’t you make the rope a bit shorter!? The steam is too hot!?”

“This much won’t kill you, right? To think that you meddled with my daughters...!”

“Stop it! Stop poking it with your sword!”

Shirley openly displays her anger by threateningly tapping the rope keeping Canary above the pot with the twin blades Igarima and Shul Shagana.

Incidentally, Canary can’t escape using magic. Because Shirley would simply cut the magic she could see in two the moment she tried anything.

“This double contract, what is it? What on earth are you plotting? Depending on your answer...”

As much as she’d like to simply cut the rope right now, she decided to at least hear Canary’s excuse, since without her she wouldn’t be able to attend the Visitation Day.

“I-it’s nothing dangerous! I just wanted you three to be the models for the first store opening of my newly launched maid cafe!”

“Maid cafe?”

Maids and a cafe. Shirley looked confused at this newly coined word, trying to imagine just why you would put the two together.

“Do you not like it? It seems that the tastes of the notables of the capitals have shifted to notions of ‘I want to be served by a maid.’ Investigating further, it came to light that even commoners have an infatuation for these maids. So, I intend to establish a franchise that seeks to fulfil these ardent hopes and desires of all people in the kingdom.”

“Ha...”

The desires of those men... Shirley can’t really relate at all.

Although she doesn’t really understand the appeal having grown up amongst maids every day for 18 years, she can’t deny the facts if this is what the common man is into nowadays.

“So, you intended to use me and my daughter as advertising test cases?”

“Exactly~! Having three such beauties with the same colour hair... Won’t it be the perfect test for the new store, mm~? I plan to hold a celebration commemorating the defeat of those dragons, and all I ask is that you and your lovely daughters wait upon the partygoers~!”

It’s funny to think of the person who led a battle having to serve tables at the celebratory feast for it, but although it should be an easy thing to decline as she has absolutely zero interest in doing it, Shirley still groaned with a scowl.

To be frank, she has no intention of forgiving the witch in front of her for deceiving Sophie and Tio, but she can’t deny that it might be good for them to have a little experience in customer service.

Simply pampering your children and doing everything for them is no way to raise them. It’s Shirley’s theory that work experience can be a cornerstone of a child’s upbringing.

Although, they were tricked into doing it. As she wondered what to do, Canary writhed about like a lobster being held above the pot and yelled.

“In the first place, have you not already signed the contract!? Even if they’re children, declining would be a breach of contract, you know!?”

“Well... After hearing the details, if my daughters agree to it, I’ll do it... Not that I’m condoning your behaviour as a swindler.”

“Indeed, indeed! Then, if we can just see to the matter of these ropes I can-”

Crrrrack!

There was an ominous sound, and the branch broke. It seems that it couldn’t support Canary’s weight as she thrashed around, and snapped.

“Ah.”

Their surprised voices came out at the same time.

And with a massive splash, the Golden Witch who held the world’s economy in the palm of her hand plunged into the pot, showering hot water all over.

The witch stew having finally come together, it wasn’t until the next day that anyone saw the main ingredient that had run screaming from the pot.

And now Canary, who had completely restored her body to pristine condition without even a single burn using magic, stood in front of the adventurers in a jubilant mood, beer mug in hand.

“Ladies and Gentlemen! Let me extend my congratulations on your victory! This night exists to celebrate your spirit... So drink and make merry!”

She thrust the mug in the air, and the party began.

“To you, the honourable and brave warriors! To the Demonic White Sword that led the charge! To your future endeavours! Cheers~!!”

“”PROSIIIIIIIIIIIIIT!!!””

The other two prongs of the dragon king attacks had been repelled by the gatherings of superhuman like adventurers.

The adventurers who had received the news were throwing a party at the rented dining room of the Deficit House.

Although there were far fewer casualties than expected due to the world creation magic, that doesn't mean there weren't any.

Even if there are some people who were only lightly wounded still attending the feast, there are several who still haven't regained consciousness because of the severity of their wounds, as well as those who didn't return at all.

That's why the adventurers celebrate. In the hopes that their noisy party might help to wake up those who are asleep.

That's why the adventurers sing. In the hopes that their choruses and ballads of brave deeds might be heard by their fallen comrades in the afterlife.

"Now, it's tomfoolery to throw a feast without beautiful girls to wait on our brave heroes. For today, yours truly went through A LOT OF TROUBLE to bring you these adorable servers~!"

Before the adventurers who had just toasted their victory, two young twins stepped out, looking like a pairing of an angel and a fairy.

Wearing sleeveless apron dresses with the skirt length reaching just a little above the knee and with thigh-high socks, long gloves that stretched to the elbow and high heels, Sophie and Tio, the daughters of that fearsome Demonic White Sword, looked more like waitresses than maids.

...However, their angry expressions didn't suit the hospitality industry at all...

"Uu... You tricked us! You tricked us, didn't you!? I can't believe you actually tricked us with that serious atmosphere and hammy lines!"

"...I want you to return all of it, all of the worrying we did."

The face of their mother who had come back home for the school visit and panicked when she saw them crying was still fresh in their minds.

But, a promise is a promise. Even if they're very... Very unhappy about the circumstances, once you've made a promise, it's your responsibility to see it done.

“Oh wow... Even though they’re just kids...!”

“I heard they were the same age as my sister... What is this weird feeling...”

“I want to have them sit on my knee as I pat their heads...”

“Mister will give you some pocket money if you like...”

Meanwhile, the adventurers who have no idea what’s going through their mind, get excited seeing the two beautiful young girls.

Those adventurers who suddenly awoke to something were the ones singing the girls’ praises the most.

...Although, the fact that the adventurers who said the last lines above got punched and kicked by people all around them is another story entirely.

“And, tonight’s leading star! The strongest swordswoman and the pride of our guild who defeated the dragon king! Through various circumstances, she will be serving everyone wearing a maid outfit! Give it up for the Demonic White Swoooooooord~!!”

The atmosphere in the room tensed up at Canary’s words, and everyone’s eyes looked to the entrance... But, Shirley did not appear.

As the adventurers looked confused, Canary ran to the entrance and poked her head around the door.

“Now now, you’re the leading role, you can’t stay back here forever!”

“Ah, Martha, don’t push me...! If I appear in public wearing this, I’ll have to live the rest of my life in shame...!”

“It’s fine! You look good!”

“T-that’s not the problem...!”

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“Ah, Canary-san! Even though she already got changed, this child is gettin’ all flustered

about getting out there!"

"Hmm, what a troublesome girl. Well, an embarrassed maid is fine as well, come along!"

"Wait-!?"

Not able to react to Canary's teleportation magic in time, Shirley was suddenly thrown into the middle of the dining room as everyone looked at her.

"No...!? P-please don't... look at me...!"



She's wearing an apron dress that is the base for all maid outfits. But, the skirt she's wearing is even shorter than her daughters', so short she's worried that people might be able to see her underwear.

Her exposed thighs are made even more seductive with the garter belt she's wearing, and there's a gap between the top and the skirt that shows off her white navel.

And most striking of all is that bountiful chest, with her cleavage exposed. That great mountain range that jiggles with even the slightest movement bewitched both men and women alike.

"Ma... Mamama... MAMA...!?"

"...What's with that outfit."

Trying to hold down the hem of her skirt with one hand and covering her breasts with the other, it was as if their mother had passed into a forbidden realm.

"T-this is...! This kind of clothing is... I'm not... Um... Ah...!"

What happened to that usual cool and determined attitude? This is what everyone thought as Shirley did her best to desperately defend her dignity, as her daughters watched on with cold eyes.

She had imagined wearing a traditional servant's uniform that emphasized virtue and loyalty, but the reality was that Canary had custom ordered this risqué maid outfit just for her.

For someone who had been raised with the notion that exposing yourself in public is the height of vulgarity, even though she was forced into it the shame she's feeling wearing these clothes is immense.

"W-what? Get a load of that chest...!"

"Oi, calm down! That's still that unsociable sword demon, you know!?"

"Thirty with two children, my arse!"

"A semi-immortal teenage body with two cute daughters... Nice..."

As the usually horribly distant and cold woman suddenly shows this side of herself, even the women are charmed, and a strange sort of passion begins to overwhelm the room.

“Quit being such a shrinking violet! You have masters to serve, do you not~!?”

Shirley still refuses to stop trying to cover herself up, so Canary looked around the room.

And spied Kyle, the rookie adventurer whose eyes were glued to Shirley’s figure.

“Oi, Mister E-rank... Kyle, was it not? Come hither for a moment.”

“...Eh? Wait, me?”

Grinning as if she’s found a new toy, Canary forced Kyle to stand in front of the white-haired mother and daughters.

“Now, repeat what I taught you.”

“Eeh!? W-we have to say that!?”

“I knew it... it’s really embarrassing...”

Kyle tensed up, unsure of what exactly they were going to say, and then...

“Umm... W-welcome...”

Sophie looked up with tearful embarrassed eyes, her hands crossed over her chest.

“...Back...”

Meanwhile, Tio mumbled as she looked away with a slight blush on her face.

“...M-Master...!”

Despite Shirley stammering out the words with absolutely no conviction, and her face completely flush, Kyle was pierced through the heart.

Kyle was stuck on the spot, completely lost in a daze of happiness, until Canary kicked

him in the rear and told him he was in the way.

...Not that he seems to care, he still seems to be lost in some happy place.

"Well then, what's next? Falling to your knees and saying 'Kyaa~♡'!? Or shall you make a heart shape with your hands over some food and say 'My love spell will make it delicious, master♡~'!?"

"Wha...!... HUH!?"

"Y-you didn't say anything about all that!?"

With a scraping of chairs, all the men rose to their feet at once with a cheer.

At Canary's sudden proposal, Shirley blushed even harder and vigorously shook her head, whilst Sophie and Tio voiced their disapproval.

To do something most women would be ashamed to do for their lover, that was too high a hurdle for Shirley.

"Fuhahahahaha! Your resistance is futile! For the course of the night, I hold you in the palm of my hand! Now, my esteemed guests! Please enjoy the service of this lovely mother and daughters trio!"

As the adventurers (mostly men) jostled to try and form lines, someone's hand grasped Canary hard by the shoulder.

"Eh, what is it!? We were just getting to the good part!"

"Looks like you're having a lot of fun, Grandma?"

Although she might have said it with a smile, those eyes are anything but, and the face of the Golden Witch became pale with fear.

"I-impossible...!? S-shouldn't you be back at the guild still...!?"

"Yes, it turns out there's a lot of paperwork involved when **someone** suddenly teleports every single adventurer under B-Rank in the town somewhere, though I can't deny I enjoyed seeing that balding branch chief squirm a bit... Regardless, after I finished work I had a bad premonition and came here. And what did I find..."

“Noooo!? U-unhand me!”

As you might have guessed from what she had called her, Yumina and Canary are relatives.

Even if she looks young, she's really over a thousand years old, and she's had many children and grandchildren across the years. As she grabbed the black horns that grew on the head of a person she could already call an ancestor by age alone, the receptionist dragged her into the corridor.

“C-cease and desist! W-what are you planning to do with me! D-don't get violent with me, young lady! No wonder you have no sex appea- AHHH!?”

Bang. Rattle rattle rattle...

The black horn that was mercilessly snapped off rolled back into the dining room.

No one knew what really became of the strongest witch after she was dragged away by her distant descendant.

After that, the party went on without a hitch.

Cudd and Leia tried to compete in a drinking game with a dwarf and a giant warrior, and both collapsed at the same time.

As the two drunkards were placed in the corner to sleep it off, Sophie and Tio ran food from the kitchen to the customers.

Shirley made sure to project severe bloodlust towards anyone who stared at the twins just a little too long.

As Shirley kept an eye out for any potential perverts, the B-rank adventurer with the buster sword kept pestering her for drinks.

As for the garbage bag with a distinctive black horn sticking out of the side... Since Yumina was scary, no one dared mention it.

“Fuu...”

As the party began to quiet down, Shirley sighed as she leaned against the wall and

looked around the dining room.

Even though she wasn't doing this for money or merit, working as a waitress had tired her out a lot more than she thought it would.

That said, even though she had managed to calm herself about halfway through the night, she swore to herself to never wear anything like this again.

To wear such exposing clothes didn't suit her at all... Well, the partygoers might have disagreed.

"Good work tonight, Shirley-san."

Yumina leant up against the wall next to Shirley, a wine glass in her hand.

"Sorry, Grandma made you do something so horrible."

"No... Because I agreed to this, my wish was granted as well. But..."

Shirley looked down at her clothes, then sighed and held her head.

"I didn't think I'd have to go out in public with such exposing clothing...!"

"About that... I'm really sorry. I have to say though, it does suit you?"

"I'm too old for this kind of thing...!"

Although it's hard to tell from just how popular Shirley was, that kind of daring clothing was more common amongst younger women.

If someone in their 30s wore things like that, they'd get comments like 'Don't overdo it'. No matter how youthful she may look, that's not the point for her.

"Canary said the same thing."

"Yep, and the other adventurers seemed positive as well, right?"

The conversation tailed off. It wasn't from awkwardness, they just watched the hustle and bustle of the party for a while in silence.

“...I’m still a little curious about it.”

Unexpectedly, the one who broke the silence between the two was Shirley.

“Why did they agree to fight against an army led by dragons? It’s hard to imagine they’d come to a battlefield with such a low chance of survival, just for the sake of money.”

She had tried asking in a roundabout way during the party and everyone just said they did it for the money, but from the looks on their faces, Shirley thought they were hiding something.

Even though she knows the main motivation was probably the desire for fame from beating a dragon, Shirley still looked confused, so Yumina answered her with a little smile.

“Well, if I had to guess... I’m sure they just wanted to fight alongside you.”

At those words, Shirley looked stunned.

“What do you mean? I thought I had a bad reputation with the other adventurers?”

“That’s right. Shirley-san is always very unfriendly, and you caused a big ruckus when you first arrived ten years ago.”

As she said that, Yumina looked at the adventurers who were still singing and having fun.

“Even though you never cooperate with anyone, they all recognize your strength... Isn’t the nickname ‘The Demonic White Sword’ proof of that? Profit and pride, I’m sure those factored into it as well, but I bet there were a lot of people who couldn’t resist the opportunity to fight alongside such an amazing adventurer, right? Actually, I’m often asked if Shirley-san has submitted any party requests.”

There are a lot of people who can’t be honest with themselves, so they’d never actually ask her face to face.

Finishing her speech, Yumina polished off the last drop of wine in her glass and looked at Shirley.

"Well then, I think I'll be going home. I have work tomorrow, after all."

As the receptionist bid her farewell, Shirley absentmindedly looked at a group of adventurers playing with her daughters.

They were the only ones that mattered to her. She had convinced herself that she could never truly show interest in other people.

Even if someone did approach her, she always assumed they had ulterior motives, and out of fear for her daughters she never let anyone get close.

"That demon is finally gone... Ouch ouch ouch ouch... Oh, it's you... Pardon my unsightly appearance."

As she watched the adventurers she had previously had zero interest in before, Canary tore her way out of the trash can, her broken horn attached with glue.

"And? What are you staring at with such a vague visage, mm~?"

"Canary... I've been wanting to ask you for a while now."

"What is it?"

"Why did you fulfill my wish by sending reinforcements, instead of just postponing the class visiting day?"

She was the principal benefactor of the school and on the board of directors, she had oversight when it came to the school's administration. She would have saved a lot of money that way, so why didn't she?

It doesn't seem rational. Although she says she engineered the entire thing for her own pleasure, Canary is a witch that would not act without real reason.

If it was for some bigger picture, or even for some trifle, she doesn't think Canary did it solely to have a night to poke fun at Shirley, or at least that's what she thought after hearing that story from one of Canary's descendants.

"There wasn't really any grand scheme at play. It was just mere sentimentality. I just wanted to see such a spectacle... And to press you into an arbitrary whim of mine... I am simply being as selfish as ever."

Canary flashed a grin.

"But, if you kept plotting that kind of course, you would eventually break down... So, I determined to intercede."

"...Can I ask why?"

"How can you seek to raise healthy daughters, if you care not a whit about yourself?"

It was such an obvious thing.

Each and every day, she only ever worried about her daughters and their future, and in making them her reason to live she neglected to live for herself at all.

When it came time for Sophie and Tio to become independent, Shirley's life would be utterly devoid of meaning.

"That's why I did it. An empty husk standing alone on a ravaged battlefield, such a thing isn't fun to play with at all."

"Playing with people's lives for your own amusement, huh...? You never really change."

"Naturally. The one before you is the Golden Witch... There is nothing under heaven that I cannot meddle with to my satisfaction."

The witch hasn't changed since ancient times. She is egotistical and always causes inconvenience for people wherever she goes, but somehow her meddling always ends up helping people in the long run, and although some people see her as a scoundrel, others love her as a goddess of luck.

"Therefore, learn to enjoy your adventures, girl. Not just for yourself, but the joy of adventuring with friends. And, sometime in the future, find a new reason to go on living. Someone who isn't happy themselves has no hope of raising happy children."

"Canary..."

"Well, having said all that, my main goal was still to see your ashamed and humiliated face in such a raunchy maid outfit! Hyahahahahaha!!"

"Please give back my improved impression of you."

Somehow, she spoiled it straight away.

(But... That's right. An adventurer is supposed to be such a person.)

She remembered back to the time where she was nothing but a weak girl.

She came from a society where love and hatred were hidden behind flattery and falsehood, and after she was betrayed and accused, those memories remained incredibly vivid and she found it hard to ever trust what people really said, fearing what darkness could lie in their hearts.

But, contrary to the aristocratic society where everyone's true intentions were hidden behind masks of deceit, these rough and vulgar adventurers didn't hold ugly motives behind sweet words, and always wore their hearts on their sleeves.

"Mama~! Martha-san is going to take a commemorative photo!"

"Mum, quickly."

"Yes, I'm coming."

She stepped back into the party atmosphere.

Of course, whilst she doesn't think she can get along with everyone suddenly, she might be able to treat people with a little less suspicion from now on. Those people who make no secret that their intentions are gold and glory, maybe it's possible to trust them.

She won't stop making her daughters her number one priority, that will never change... But, if at the end of requests from now on, there can be parties like this one that she can enjoy with her daughters...

...Then, maybe working as an adventurer isn't too much of a hassle.

The adventurers noticed her and looked at each other with laughs and smiles.

That cold and blunt woman, a sword demon characterized by those fierce eyes that seemed to drill right through you, caught everyone's eye as she smiled back.

"I'm going to get changed, so can you wait just a little while?"

" "...No." "



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